

Examples of those services that assist persons with disabilities or their families that are funded, authorized, or provided by the state of Florida include the following:

- Developmental Disabilities Program (ch. 393, F.S.), Adult Services (ch. 410, F.S.), Mental Health Program (ch. 394, F.S.), and Special Needs Adoption (s. 409.166, F.S.) (Department of Children and Families);
- Infant and Toddlers Early Intervention Program, Children's Medical Services Network (s. 391.011, F.S.), and Brain and Spinal Cord Injury Program (s. 381.75, F.S.) (Department of Health);
- Exceptional Student Education Program (s.230.23, F.S.), Occupational Access and Opportunity Commission /Vocational Rehabilitation Services (ch. 413, Part III, F.S.) and Regional Autism Centers (s. 228.055, F.S.) (Department of Education);
- Emergency Management Registry of persons with special needs (s. 252.355, F.S.) (Department of Community Affairs);
- Medicaid Program (ss. 409.901 – 409.920, F.S.) (Agency for Health Care Administration);
- Transportation Disadvantaged (ch. 427, Part I, F.S.) (Department of Transportation);
- Blind Services Program (ch. 413, Part I, F.S.), Independent Living Programs (s. 413.40, F.S.), Assistive technology services (s. 413.407, F.S.) (Department of Labor and Employment Security);
- Telecommunication Access System for persons with hearing and speech impairments (ch. 427, Part II, F.S.) (Public Service Commission); and
- Program for Dependent Care for Families with Children with Special Needs (s. 445.023, F.S.) (Workforce Florida, Inc.).

In addition, there are a number of other organizations that offer assistance relative to disability issues, such as the Family Network on Disabilities, the Advocacy Center for Persons with Disabilities, and the Florida Developmental Disabilities Council. Counties and municipalities have responsibilities that impact individuals with disabilities, such as enforcing the accessibility codes for building construction and parking spaces. The federal government also offers several important services for individuals with disabilities, in particular, Social Security Disability and Supplemental Security Income.

There are a number of programs, services and organizations that can assist individuals and families with information and referral relative to disabilities issues. Many of these entities have 1-800 phone lines or specific information and referral systems for particular areas of the disability fields. Examples of these specialized 1-800 services and information and referral systems include the following:

- Division of Blind Services (ch. 413, Part I, F.S.) has a 1-800 line to offer assistance to individuals who are blind.
- Florida Telecommunication Relay Services (ch. 427, Part II, F.S.) has a 1-800 voice and TDD line to offer assistance with obtaining equipment and information on relay services for telecommunication access for individuals who are hearing or speech impaired.
- ABLE Trust (a non-profit organization of the Florida Endowment Foundation for Vocational Rehabilitation, s. 413.615, F.S.) offers a toll-free information and referral line that provides an array of services, such as retraining a person with skills suited for the job market.

- Division of Vocational Rehabilitative Services offers a toll free telephone service to respond to questions relative to rehabilitation and related services as required by s. 413.73, F.S.
- Florida Directory of Early Childhood Services is a statewide, computerized information and referral system for families, service coordinators, and other professionals to help find services for children with disabilities or other special needs. This information and referral system meets the state's requirement for a central directory pursuant to 20 U.S.C. 1435(7)(a) in order to receive Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, Part C funding.

However, individuals and families often do not know how to access this information and assistance, nor may they understand the programs and their requirements well enough to navigate the systems to secure the necessary services. While information systems exist for specific disabilities, or specific ages, or specific disability issues, there is not a single entity that has a comprehensive compilation of disability resources across all disabilities and all ages, with the corresponding knowledge of the systems and resources from which to ease the complexity of the systems.

Many communities have local information and referral networks that maintain and offer information on generic services available in their area to the general public, many of whom also collect and provide information on local disability related services. The Federal Communication Commission in July 2000 adopted and released an order designating the use of 211 to provide access to community information and referral services. The Florida Alliance of Information and Referral Services has been working to connect and coordinate the information and referral services in each community for a statewide information network. The Alliance, along with the United Way of Florida, has also been working to collaborate on efforts relative to the 211 initiative.

Section 20.22, F.S., provides for the Department of Management Services. The current statutorily established divisions and programs contained in the department are Facilities Program, Information Technology Program, Workforce Program, Support Program, Federal Property Assistance Program, Administration Program, Division of Administrative Hearings, Division of Retirement, and Division of State Group Insurance. Currently, the Department of Management Services houses the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Working Group. Their mission is to provide technical training and assistance to all state agencies, local units of government and any interested party in the area of compliance with ADA issues.

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

SB 1650 creates a Clearinghouse on Disability Information Office for the purpose of developing and maintaining a statewide toll-free information and referral system, the focus of which is to provide information and referral for all disability related and generic services, assistance, programs and resources that individuals with disabilities and their families need. The intent of the legislature expressed in the bill is to develop a statewide system of disability services and recourse so that individuals with disabilities, family members, professionals and the general public can easily gain access to information concerning disability related services and resources in the state. Since a number of information and referral systems currently exist, the clearinghouse

is to provide a central point from which to access these existing information and referral systems or other disability related resources.

The Clearinghouse on Disability Information Office is to be housed for administrative purposes within the Department of Management Services. However, the clearinghouse and its operation are not subject to any control, supervision or direction by the department. The clearinghouse is to prepare an annual budget request to be submitted to the Governor without modification by the department.

The bill identifies the following functions of the clearinghouse: providing information for all disabilities and all ages, providing information on all types of disability related services, providing information on generic services that may assist individuals with disabilities and their families, providing an adequate level of information so as to assist individuals with disabilities to navigate the system, directing individuals to existing information systems, maintaining a comprehensive compilation of disability information without re-collecting information already available, identifying gaps in existing information systems and addressing this information need, providing information in alternative formats upon request, developing the capacity to offer the information in multiple languages, and publicizing the office's information and referral system.

An advisory council is to be established by the clearinghouse to assist the office in planning and developing its services. The council is to meet at least four times a year and provide advice to the clearinghouse in carrying out its functions, including collaborating with disability programs and organizations, using existing information and referral systems, developing avenues for exchanging of information on modifications in state and community services and services of the office, developing services and systems, and recommending improvements. Members of the advisory council are not to exceed 20. Specific appointments by designated state agencies are delineated who, once appointed, identify the remaining council members. At least one-third of the members must be individuals with disabilities or family members, and state agency representatives cannot exceed one-third of the advisory council membership.

Staff of the clearinghouse consists of a director, information specialist, and support staff. Experience in the disability field is required of those staff working directly with the users of the information and referral system, and strong consideration is required to be given to hiring individuals with disabilities or family members. A selection committee consisting of specific organizational representatives as described in the bill are to identify three candidates from which the Department of Management Services is to select the director.

State agencies are directed to collaborate with the clearinghouse in sharing information to establish and maintain the information and referral system. The clearinghouse is directed to utilize standards of information and referral that will allow for the sharing of information among information and referral systems in the state. Collaboration in establishing a statewide information and referral system and 211 network is required. The bill specifically requires that the office and all of its services fully comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

The bill provides for a phase-in progression to the establishment and performance of the functions of the clearinghouse. Initially, the clearinghouse is to develop a base of state-level resources and information, as well as federal social security and supplemental security

information, to be offered by the clearinghouse information and referral system. After the foundation of state level information has been established in the system, the clearinghouse will determine how to access and provide information on community based services. The bill specifically requires that existing state and local information and referral systems be utilized and that the clearinghouse information and referral system not duplicate existing systems.

The Clearinghouse on Disability Information Office is required to submit an annual report on its services to the Governor, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives. The report is to contain a description of the resources in the information and referral system and the services offered, data on the requests for information received, activities of the advisory council, how the office complied with the prescribed functions and improvements made to the system.

The bill is effective upon becoming law.

IV. Constitutional Issues:

A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:

None.

B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:

None.

C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

None.

V. Economic Impact and Fiscal Note:

A. Tax/Fee Issues:

None.

B. Private Sector Impact:

None.

C. Government Sector Impact:

The Department of Children and Family Services did not identify a fiscal impact for the department.

The Department of Health reports that there may be a fiscal impact if all information provided by the department to the Clearinghouse on Disability Information Office is required to be available in all accessible formats and multiple languages.

The Department of Management Services estimates the fiscal impact for the Clearinghouse on Disability Information Office to be \$273,593. This includes \$132,593 for salaries and benefits, \$2,500 for other personal services, \$137,000 for expenses, and \$1,500 for data processing services.

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

The language used in delineating the functions of the advisory council of “forming linkages” through which information can be exchanged between community services and the office implies an unknown and potential formal arrangement.

VII. Related Issues:

None.

VIII. Amendments:

#1 by Children and Families:

Corrects the reference to telecommunication devices for the deaf.

#2 by Children and Families:

Clarifies the exchanging of information function of the advisory council.