

CHAPTER 2014-227

Committee Substitute for Committee Substitute for House Bill No. 561

An act relating to attorneys for dependent children with special needs; creating s. 39.01305, F.S.; providing legislative findings and intent; defining the term “dependent child”; requiring appointment of an attorney to represent a dependent child who meets one or more specified criteria; requiring that, if one is available, an attorney who is willing to represent a child without additional compensation be appointed; requiring that the appointment be in writing; requiring that the appointment continue in effect until the attorney is allowed to withdraw or is discharged by the court or until the case is dismissed; requiring that an attorney not acting in a pro bono capacity be adequately compensated for his or her services and have access to funding for certain costs; providing for financial oversight by the Justice Administrative Commission; providing a limit on attorney fees; requiring the Department of Children and Families to develop procedures to identify dependent children who qualify for an attorney; providing rulemaking authority; providing applicability; providing an effective date.

Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:

Section 1. Section 39.01305, Florida Statutes, is created to read:

39.01305 Appointment of an attorney for a dependent child with certain special needs.—

(1)(a) The Legislature finds that:

1. All children in proceedings under this chapter have important interests at stake, such as health, safety, and well-being and the need to obtain permanency.

2. A dependent child who has certain special needs has a particular need for an attorney to represent the dependent child in proceedings under this chapter, as well as in fair hearings and appellate proceedings, so that the attorney may address the child’s medical and related needs and the services and supports necessary for the child to live successfully in the community.

(b) The Legislature recognizes the existence of organizations that provide attorney representation to children in certain jurisdictions throughout the state. Further, the statewide Guardian Ad Litem Program provides best interest representation for dependent children in every jurisdiction in accordance with state and federal law. The Legislature, therefore, does not intend that funding provided for representation under this section supplant proven and existing organizations representing children. Instead, the Legislature intends that funding provided for representation under this section be an additional resource for the representation of more children in

these jurisdictions, to the extent necessary to meet the requirements of this chapter, with the cooperation of existing local organizations or through the expansion of those organizations. The Legislature encourages the expansion of pro bono representation for children. This section is not intended to limit the ability of a pro bono attorney to appear on behalf of a child.

(2) As used in this section, the term “dependent child” means a child who is subject to any proceeding under this chapter. The term does not require that a child be adjudicated dependent for purposes of this section.

(3) An attorney shall be appointed for a dependent child who:

(a) Resides in a skilled nursing facility or is being considered for placement in a skilled nursing home;

(b) Is prescribed a psychotropic medication but declines assent to the psychotropic medication;

(c) Has a diagnosis of a developmental disability as defined in s. 393.063;

(d) Is being placed in a residential treatment center or being considered for placement in a residential treatment center; or

(e) Is a victim of human trafficking as defined in s. 787.06(2)(d).

(4)(a) Before a court may appoint an attorney, who may be compensated pursuant to this section, the court must request a recommendation from the Statewide Guardian Ad Litem Office for an attorney who is willing to represent a child without additional compensation. If such an attorney is available within 15 days after the court’s request, the court must appoint that attorney. However, the court may appoint a compensated attorney within the 15-day period if the Statewide Guardian Ad Litem Office informs the court that it will not be able to recommend an attorney within that time period.

(b) After an attorney is appointed, the appointment continues in effect until the attorney is allowed to withdraw or is discharged by the court or until the case is dismissed. An attorney who is appointed under this section to represent the child shall provide the complete range of legal services, from the removal from home or from the initial appointment through all available appellate proceedings. With the permission of the court, the attorney for the dependent child may arrange for supplemental or separate counsel to represent the child in appellate proceedings. A court order appointing an attorney under this section must be in writing.

(5) Except if the attorney has agreed to provide pro bono services, an appointed attorney or organization must be adequately compensated and provided with access to funding for expert witnesses, depositions, and other costs of litigation. Payment to an attorney is subject to appropriations and subject to review by the Justice Administrative Commission for reasonableness. The Justice Administrative Commission shall contract with

attorneys appointed by the court. Attorney fees may not exceed \$1,000 per child per year.

(6) The department shall develop procedures to identify a dependent child who has a special need specified under subsection (3) and to request that a court appoint an attorney for the child.

(7) The department may adopt rules to administer this section.

(8) This section does not limit the authority of the court to appoint an attorney for a dependent child in a proceeding under this chapter.

(9) Implementation of this section is subject to appropriations expressly made for that purpose.

Section 2. This act shall take effect July 1, 2014.

Approved by the Governor June 25, 2014.

Filed in Office Secretary of State June 25, 2014.