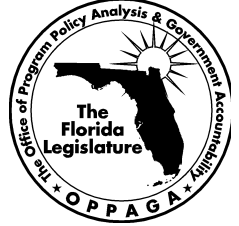




The Florida Legislature

OFFICE OF PROGRAM POLICY ANALYSIS AND GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY



RESEARCH MEMORANDUM

The Commission on Marriage and Family Support Initiatives Disbanded Due to State Budget Reductions

June 4, 2009

Summary

As requested, OPPAGA examined whether changes should be made to statutory provisions that created the Florida Commission on Marriage and Family Support Initiatives.

The Legislature created the commission in 2003 to increase public awareness of the problems of families and develop strategies to strengthen marriages, support parents and families, and promote the well-being of children. However, as a result of budget shortfalls, the 2008 Legislature eliminated the commission's appropriation based on the Department of Children and Families' recommendation to give a higher priority to funding direct services for children and families. The commission disbanded as of June 30, 2008, due to lack of funding. The Legislature should consider repealing s. 383.0115, *Florida Statutes*, as these provisions relate to an entity that no longer exists.

Purpose, Organization, and Responsibilities

The 2003 Legislature created the Commission on Marriage and Family Support Initiatives to increase public awareness of the problems of families, including failing marriages, violence, poverty, substance abuse, and lack of access to needed community systems and supports. The commission's goals were to strengthen marriages, support parents and families, and promote the well-being of children by raising public awareness, developing sound public policy, and advocating for promising practices throughout Florida.^{1, 2}

As required by statute, the commission developed public policy reports on strategies to promote responsible parenting, recommendations to increase access to parenting and marriage skills training and support for two-parent families, and successful ways to promote marriage and family life in Florida. The commission also developed a public awareness campaign to promote marriage in Florida families and served as a clearinghouse for research information on the effects

¹ Section 383.0115, *F.S.*

² The commission replaced the prior Commission on Responsible Fatherhood. The Legislature created the Commission on Responsible Fatherhood in 1996 to raise awareness of the problems created when a child grows up without the presence of a responsible father, to identify obstacles that impede or prevent the involvement of responsible fathers in the lives of their children, and to identify strategies that are successful in encouraging responsible fatherhood.

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of poverty, violence, and other social forces on families and innovative approaches to deliver services needed for strong families.

The commission was composed of 18 members from the public and the private sector, including community and faith-based organizations. The commission's annual appropriation of \$250,000 in general revenue was included in appropriations for the Department of Children and Families. Commission funding primarily covered the costs of three staff and commission members' travel expenses. The commission was housed in the Ounce of Prevention Fund of Florida, a non-profit organization that served as the commission's fiscal agent through a contract with the Department of Children and Families.

The Legislature eliminated the commission's funding for Fiscal Year 2008-09; the commission subsequently disbanded. In August 2007, as a result of joint instructions from the Legislature and the Executive Office of the Governor intended to address projected revenue shortfalls, state agencies provided prioritized lists of reductions to their Fiscal Year 2007-08 budgets. Agencies were to provide sufficient reductions to equal 10% of their general revenue appropriations.

The Department of Children and Families recommended reducing funding that supported administrative functions before reducing funding for direct services to children and families. The department provided the Governor and Legislature a prioritized list of budget reduction options. These options included a recommendation to eliminate the \$250,000 contract that provided the commission with administrative support. The 2008 Legislature adopted this recommendation and eliminated the commission's recurring appropriation for Fiscal Year 2008-09. The commission ceased operations as of June 30, 2008, due to lack of funding.

Options for Legislative Consideration

The Commission on Marriage and Family Support Initiatives is no longer funded and has ceased operations. As a result, the provisions of s. 383.0115, *Florida Statutes*, are no longer relevant and the Legislature should consider repealing these sections of statute.