

MEMORANDUM

Agenda Item No. 11(A)(22)

TO: Honorable Chairman Oliver G. Gilbert, III
and Members, Board of County Commissioners

DATE: November 7, 2023

FROM: Geri Bonzon-Keenan
County Attorney

SUBJECT: Resolution urging the Florida Legislature to (1) amend Florida's School Readiness Program eligibility criteria to increase access for children in need of early childhood education and alleviate the existing burden on supplemental resources used to assist low-income families created by the current program's eligibility criteria; and (2) increase child care provider reimbursement rates statewide to offset higher operational costs incurred by the providers while ensuring that counties receive at least as much funding as received in the previous fiscal year

The accompanying resolution was prepared and placed on the agenda at the request of Prime Sponsor Senator René García.


Geri Bonzon-Keenan
County Attorney

GBK/jp

MDC001



MEMORANDUM
(Revised)

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and Members, Board of County Commissioners

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Please note any items checked.

- "3-Day Rule" for committees applicable if raised
- 6 weeks required between first reading and public hearing
- 4 weeks notification to municipal officials required prior to public hearing
- Decreases revenues or increases expenditures without balancing budget
- Budget required
- Statement of fiscal impact required
- Statement of social equity required
- Ordinance creating a new board requires detailed County Mayor's report for public hearing
- No committee review
- Applicable legislation requires more than a majority vote (i.e., 2/3's present ____, 2/3 membership ____, 3/5's ____, unanimous ____, CDMP 7 vote requirement per 2-116.1(3)(h) or (4)(c) ____, CDMP 2/3 vote requirement per 2-116.1(3)(h) or (4)(c) ____, or CDMP 9 vote requirement per 2-116.1(4)(c)(2) ____) to approve
- Current information regarding funding source, index code and available balance, and available capacity (if debt is contemplated) required

Approved _____ Mayor
Veto _____
Override _____

Agenda Item No. 11(A)(22)
11-7-23

RESOLUTION NO. _____

RESOLUTION URGING THE FLORIDA LEGISLATURE TO (1) AMEND FLORIDA’S SCHOOL READINESS PROGRAM ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA TO INCREASE ACCESS FOR CHILDREN IN NEED OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND ALLEVIATE THE EXISTING BURDEN ON SUPPLEMENTAL RESOURCES USED TO ASSIST LOW-INCOME FAMILIES CREATED BY THE CURRENT PROGRAM’S ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA; AND (2) INCREASE CHILD CARE PROVIDER REIMBURSEMENT RATES STATEWIDE TO OFFSET HIGHER OPERATIONAL COSTS INCURRED BY THE PROVIDERS WHILE ENSURING THAT COUNTIES RECEIVE AT LEAST AS MUCH FUNDING AS RECEIVED IN THE PREVIOUS FISCAL YEAR

WHEREAS, Florida’s School Readiness Program provides subsidies for child care services and early childhood education for children who are (1) from low-income families; (2) in protective services and victims or at risk of abuse, neglect, abandonment, or homelessness; (3) foster children; and (4) children with disabilities; and

WHEREAS, the program not only helps young children prepare for school, but also provides child care so a parent can work or attend a training or education program; and

WHEREAS, the Florida Department of Education’s Division of Early Learning administers the program at the state level and early learning coalitions administer the program at the county and regional levels; and

WHEREAS, the program’s two main goals are to help families become financially self-sufficient and to help each child from a qualifying family develop school readiness skills; and

WHEREAS, many working parents across Miami-Dade County—in retail, hospitality, restaurants, and “essential” jobs—are beneficiaries of Florida’s School Readiness Program; and

WHEREAS, under section 1002.87(1), Florida Statutes, children eligible for the program include children of a certain age who are from “economically disadvantaged” working families; and

WHEREAS, under section 1002.81(6), Florida Statutes, “economically disadvantaged” is defined as “having a family income that does not exceed 150 percent of the federal poverty level and includes being a child of a working migratory family as defined by 34 C.F.R. s. 200.81(d) or (f) or an agricultural worker who is employed by more than one agricultural employer during the course of a year, and whose income varies according to weather conditions and market stability”; and

WHEREAS, given the impact of inflation in this community, the rising cost of living, and an increasing minimum wage across the state, many children previously eligible for the program no longer qualify as their family income now exceeds 150 percent of the federal poverty level; and

WHEREAS, this phenomenon has created a “benefits cliff” where low-income families find themselves with an income just above 150 percent of the federal poverty level and unable to afford child care while attempting to shift to self-sufficiency; and

WHEREAS, early learning coalitions administering the program at the county and regional levels are unable, on their own, to provide subsidies for families falling off the benefits cliff, and an unnecessary strain is being placed on supplemental resources that exist to assist children of families with incomes just above 150 percent of the federal poverty level; and

WHEREAS, for example, the Children’s Trust in Miami-Dade County has a child care scholarship initiative as part of its Thrive by 5 early learning quality improvement system for families that earn between 150 and 300 percent of the federal poverty level, and there are currently more than 1,300 children on the waiting list; and

WHEREAS, determining income eligibility based on a percentage of the state median income instead of the federal poverty level would increase access to the School Readiness Program by creating a more flexible eligibility requirement that (1) ensures the program works as intended by allowing low-income families to work while their children are learning; (2) allows the County to use designated funds for more children; and (3) alleviates the burden placed on other supplemental resources used to assist low-income families; and

WHEREAS, to address the above issues, this Board wishes to urge the Florida Legislature to increase access to the School Readiness Program by amending the eligibility criteria; and

WHEREAS, funding for the School Readiness Program is comprised primarily of federal block grant funding and allocated annually through a funding formula; and

WHEREAS, due to the increased operational costs of child care services, challenges with recruitment and retention of qualified instructional staff, and additional program requirements, the Division of Early Learning and early learning coalitions would greatly benefit from increases to child care provider reimbursement rates statewide in order to continue to provide adequate services to children; and

WHEREAS, this Board would like to urge the Florida Legislature to, in addition to amending the eligibility criteria for the School Readiness Program, raise the program's provider reimbursement rates statewide and ensure that funding levels for early learning coalitions remain equitable statewide, all of which would help guarantee that early learning coalitions can continue to successfully administer the School Readiness Program,

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS OF MIAMI-DADE COUNTY, FLORIDA, that this Board:

Section 1. Urges the Florida Legislature to amend the School Readiness Program eligibility criteria to increase access for children in need of early childhood education and alleviate the existing burden on supplemental resources used to assist low-income families created by the current program’s eligibility criteria.

Section 2. Urges the Florida Legislature to increase child care provider reimbursement rates statewide, which would offset higher operational costs incurred by those providers, while ensuring that counties receive at least as much funding as received in the previous fiscal year.

Section 3. Directs the Clerk of the Board to send certified copies of this Resolution to the Governor, the Senate President, the House Speaker, and the Chair and Members of the Miami-Dade State Legislative Delegation.

Section 4. Directs the County’s state lobbyists to advocate for the legislation described in sections 1 and 2 above, and authorizes and directs the Office of Intergovernmental Affairs to amend the 2024 State Legislative Package to include this item.

The Prime Sponsor of the foregoing resolution is Senator René García. It was offered by Commissioner _____, who moved its adoption. The motion was seconded by Commissioner _____ and upon being put to a vote, the vote was as follows:

- | | |
|------------------------|----------------------------------|
| | Oliver G. Gilbert, III, Chairman |
| | Anthony Rodríguez, Vice Chairman |
| Marleine Bastien | Juan Carlos Bermudez |
| Kevin Marino Cabrera | Sen. René García |
| Roberto J. Gonzalez | Keon Hardemon |
| Danielle Cohen Higgins | Eileen Higgins |
| Kionne L. McGhee | Raquel A. Regalado |
| Micky Steinberg | |

The Chairperson thereupon declared this resolution duly passed and adopted this 7th day of November, 2023. This resolution shall become effective upon the earlier of (1) 10 days after the date of its adoption unless vetoed by the County Mayor, and if vetoed, shall become effective only upon an override by this Board, or (2) approval by the County Mayor of this resolution and the filing of this approval with the Clerk of the Board.

MIAMI-DADE COUNTY, FLORIDA
BY ITS BOARD OF
COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

JUAN FERNANDEZ-BARQUIN, CLERK

By: _____
Deputy Clerk

Approved by County Attorney as
to form and legal sufficiency.

RC

Ryan Carlin