

HB 712 -- CHILDREN AND LOW-INCOME FAMILIES FUTURE (CLIFF) PROGRAM

SPONSOR: Shaul (113)

This bill requires the Department of Social Services to develop and oversee the "Children and Low-Income Families Future" (CLIFF) program in which the child care assistance program is modified to allow participants who wish to participate in the pilot program to continue to receive child care assistance while sharing in the cost of such assistance if their income exceeds the income eligibility limit. The pilot program must initially be implemented in the counties of Greene, Jefferson, and Pemiscot. The bill requires the department to enter into a memorandum of understanding with each participating county. The memorandum must govern the implementation of the pilot program in such county including how the county decides which and how many families can participate in the pilot program.

The bill requires each participating county to receive a grant under the provisions of the bill. Grant moneys may be used, at the county's discretion, to cover the administrative costs of participating in the pilot program and the costs of providing continued benefits to families participating in the pilot program. Administrative costs of participating in the program are capped at 3% of the amount of grant moneys received.

The bill creates the "Children and Low-Income Families Future Program Fund," in the state treasury consisting of any moneys that may be appropriated to the fund. Funds appropriated under these provisions must be used to provide grants to participating counties. The bill requires the state treasurer to be custodian of the fund and the fund must be managed as specified in the bill.

The bill requires that each participating county have the flexibility to design the pilot program in a manner that best addresses the county's specific community needs. In developing the pilot program for the county, the county may limit participation to a reasonable percentage of the county's caseload for the child care assistance program. A county may also limit participation in the pilot program to families who enter the child care assistance program with children who are 36 months of age or younger. A participating county must continue to provide child care assistance for a period of up to two years for a group of participants who have been receiving child care assistance from the county and whose income exceeds the county-adopted income eligibility limit for the county's child care assistance program. The county must require a parent who is receiving extended child care assistance to pay a series of incremental increases in the portion of the parental share of the child care costs on a scheduled basis based upon a

formula established by the county; except that, assistance cannot be provided if such income exceeds the maximum level of eligibility for services set by federal law for a family of the same size. The county must assist participating families to achieve a gradual transition off of the child care assistance over a two-year period and each county must set its own parental fee schedule and may consult with the department on setting the parental fee schedule.

The bill requires the pilot program to begin July 1, 2018. A county must operate the pilot program for at least five years. Each participating county is required to identify the families participating in the pilot program in that county. The department must collect all data on the pilot program annually and must evaluate and report to the General Assembly annually on the pilot program using measurable outcomes.

The bill requires the department to compile the data submitted by the counties and submit a report on the pilot program with the department's findings and recommendations to the General Assembly by October 1, 2023, and must make the report available to the public on its website and through other electronic means. The department's report must include specified information.

The bill contains a sunset provision.

This bill is the same as HB 713 (2017).