



*Nothing is politically right
that is morally wrong.*

MISSOURI SENATE
JEFFERSON CITY

*Free and fair discussion
is the firmest friend of truth.*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Legislation Reforming and Saving First Steps Program
Gains Senate First Round of Approval**

JEFFERSON CITY – The Senate gave first round approval today to legislation that reforms a program that provides 8,000 developmentally disabled Missouri infants and toddlers with early intervention services. Senate President Pro Tem Michael Gibbons, R - Kirkwood, sponsored Senate Bill 500 which protects and improves the state’s First Steps program.

“This bill preserves and protects the program and makes it better for the children who benefit from it,” Gibbons said. “We have found a way that we can serve these children and at the same time make it more cost effective for the taxpayers.”

SB 500 shifts oversight of care services to regional centers that would be created under the bill. Other aspects, including billing of providers, would remain centralized under the direction of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Another reform aspect is the introduction of a participation fee based on a family’s income and size. Families that qualify for Medicaid would not be subject to the fee while other families would pay no more than \$100 per month on a sliding scale. Also, those families that are deemed “unable to pay” by new program guidelines would be exempt from paying the participation fee.

Currently, the First Steps program has no income cap meaning all participants are covered at the state’s expense. Gibbons said the First Steps program is a case where it is appropriate to expect private health insurance providers to help cover these early services.

“Now families that already have access to health insurance will have a choice to use their own pediatrician and options when diagnosing and treating a child with signs of delayed development,” Gibbons said. “By engaging sources of payment outside of the state program we will be able to give parents more options and help more children with less cost to the state.”

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The bill mandates private health insurance companies to provide coverage of early intervention services for children medically diagnosed with delayed development. The measure calls for coverage up to \$3,000 a year per child, with a total of \$9,000 over three years.

The bill must receive a final round of approval from the Senate before moving to the House where it will receive similar consideration.

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