



*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
Advances to the Governor**

JEFFERSON CITY – Reforms saving a program that provides more than 8,000 developmentally disabled Missouri infants and toddlers with early intervention services awaits the governor’s signature thanks to legislation sponsored by Senate President Pro Tem Michael R. Gibbons, R-Kirkwood. Senate Bill 500 protects and improves the state’s First Steps program.

“This bill preserves and protects the program, makes it better for the children who benefit from it while making it more cost effective for the taxpayers,” Gibbons said. “The savings generated from these reforms will help ensure this valuable children’s program is not on the chopping block year after year.”

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 families that make more than 200 percent of the federal poverty level, or \$38,700 for a family of four, would pay a fee starting at \$5 based on a sliding scale. Families experiencing economic hardships defined by new program guidelines would be exempt from paying the participation fee as well.

“We heard from several therapists that a minimal participation fee would encourage a better partnership between care providers and the families seeking services for their children,” Gibbons said. “And by engaging sources of payment outside of the state program, including requiring insurance companies to cover these early services, we will 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. Any co-payments required by private health insurance providers as well as any costs above the \$3,000 insurance allotment per child per year would be paid for by the program.

SB 500 passed with an emergency clause meaning the reforms will take effect upon the governor's signature.

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