

# Florida Children's Initiative Overview & Designation Process

## I. Overview

The 2008 Florida Legislature assigned The Ounce of Prevention Fund of Florida the responsibility for reviewing and approving requests from local municipalities and/or counties to obtain a Children's Initiative designation. The authority to review and approve such requests is based in Florida Statute (F.S.) 409.147<sup>1</sup>.

A Children's Initiative is a neighborhood or community in Florida where the infrastructure and opportunities that middle-class communities take for granted are nonexistent or so marginal that they are ineffective:

1. Children living in these neighborhoods are not read to by an adult on a regular basis and attend a prekindergarten education program at a much lower rate than children in other communities.
2. These children experience below-average performance on standardized tests and graduate from high school in fewer numbers.
3. Most of these children are eligible for the free or reduced-price school lunch program.
4. Children in these neighborhoods often suffer from high rates of asthma, a higher risk of lead poisoning, and inadequate health care, and they are routinely exposed to violence and crime.

In spite of these obstacles, these neighborhoods are many times home to strong individuals and institutions that are committed to making a difference in the lives of children and their families.

It is therefore the intent of the Legislature to assist disadvantaged areas within the state in creating a community-based service network that develops, coordinates, and provides quality education, accessible health care, youth development programs, opportunities for employment, and safe and affordable housing for children and families living within its boundaries.

F.S. 409.147 establishes a process that clearly identifies severely disadvantaged areas and provides guidance for developing a new social service paradigm that systematically coordinates programs that address the critical needs of children and their families and for directing efforts to rebuild the basic infrastructure of the community.

### **Requesting a Children's Initiative Designation**

Municipalities and/or communities seeking a Children's Initiative designation from the state of Florida should follow the process prescribed by the Legislature and outlined in sections II and III of this document to create a Children's Initiative and request designation. If a local Children's Initiative already exists, the governmental entity requesting designation for the existing Children's Initiative should submit a their request along with documentation, as listed in section III of this document, demonstrating the initiative has satisfied all of the designation criteria.

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<sup>1</sup> The original statute was amended in 2009 in HB381.

## II. Children's Initiative Designation Process

A county or municipality, or a county and one or more municipalities together, may make a request to the Ounce of Prevention Fund to designate an area as a Children's Initiative after the governing body has:

### I. Adopted a resolution that:

- A. Finds that an area exists in such county or municipality, or in the county and one or more municipalities, that chronically exhibits extreme and unacceptable levels of poverty, unemployment, physical deterioration, as well as limited access to quality educational, health care, and social services.
- B. Determines that the rehabilitation, conservation, or redevelopment, or a combination thereof, of the area is necessary in the interest of improving the health, wellness, education, living conditions, and livelihoods of the children and families who live in the county or municipality.
- C. Determines that the revitalization of the area can occur only if the state and the private sector invest resources to improve infrastructure and the provision of services.

### II. Established a Children's Initiative planning team that includes residents (at least half of the members of the planning team must be residents of the area seeking designation) and representatives from community-based organizations and other community institutions to:

- A. Develop a planning process that sets the direction for, builds a commitment to, and develops the capacity to realize the Children's Initiative concept.
- B. Develop a vision of what the Children's Initiative will look like when the challenges, problems, and opportunities in the Children's Initiative are successfully addressed.
- C. Identify important opportunities, strengths, challenges and problems in the Children's Initiative.
- D. Develop a strategic community plan consisting of goals, objectives, tasks, the designation of responsible parties, the identification of resources needed, timelines for implementation of the plan, and procedures for monitoring outcomes; including workgroups to specifically address focus areas that include, but are not limited to:
  - i. Early development and care of children
  - ii. Education of children and youth
  - iii. Health and wellness
  - iv. Youth Support
  - v. Parent and guardian support
  - vi. Adult education
  - vii. Community safety
  - viii. Housing and community development

**III. Adopted a strategic community plan, developed by the planning team, that includes but is not limited to the following:**

- A. Early development and care of children
  - i. Providing resources to enable every child to be adequately nurtured during the first 3 years of life.
  - ii. Ensuring that all schools are ready for children and all children are ready for school.
  - iii. Facilitating enrollment in half-day or full-day prekindergarten for all 3-year-old and 4-year-old children.
  - iv. Strengthening parent and guardian relationships with care providers.
  - v. Providing support and education for families and child care providers.
  - vi. Education of children and youth
  - vii. Increasing the level and degree of accountability of persons who are responsible for the development and well-being of all children in the Children's Initiative.
  - viii. Changing the structure and function of schools to increase the quality and amount of time spent on instruction and increase programmatic options and offerings.
  - ix. Creating a safe and respectful environment for student learning.
  - x. Identifying and supporting points of alignment between the Children's Initiative community plan and the school district's strategic plan.
- B. Health and wellness
  - i. Facilitating enrollment of all eligible children in the Florida Kidcare program and providing full access to high-quality drug and alcohol treatment services.
  - ii. Eliminating health disparities between racial and cultural groups, including improving outcomes and increasing interventions.
  - iii. Providing fresh, good quality, affordable, and nutritious food within the Children's Initiative.
  - iv. Providing all children in the Children's Initiative with access to safe structured and unstructured recreation.
- C. Youth support
  - i. Increasing the high school graduation rate.
  - ii. Increasing leadership development and employment opportunities for youth.
- D. Parent and guardian support.
  - i. Increasing parent and adult literacy.
  - ii. Expanding access for parents to critical resources, such as jobs, transportation, day care, and after-school care.

- iii. Improving the effectiveness of the ways in which support systems communicate and collaborate with parents and the ways in which parents communicate and collaborate with support systems.
  - iv. Making the services of the Healthy Families Florida program available to provide multiyear support to expectant parents and persons caring for infants and toddlers.
  - v. Adult education, training, and jobs.
  - vi. Creating job opportunities for adults that lead to career development.
  - vii. Establishing a career and technical school, or a satellite of such a school in the Children’s Initiative, which includes a one-stop career center.
- E. Community safety.
- i. Providing a safe environment for all children at home, in school, and in the community.
  - ii. Eliminating the economic, political, and social forces that lead to a lack of safety within the family, the community, schools, and institutional structures.
  - iii. Assessing policies and practices, including sentencing, incarceration, detention, and data reporting, in order to reduce youth violence, crime, and recidivism.
- F. Housing and community development.
- i. Strengthening the residential real estate market.
  - ii. Building on existing efforts to promote socioeconomic diversity when developing a comprehensive land use strategic plan.
  - iii. Promoting neighborhood beautification strategies.

**IV. Created a corporation not for profit.**

The county or municipality shall create a corporation not for profit (Children’s Initiative Corporation) which shall be registered, incorporated, organized and operated in compliance with F.S. Chapter 617. The purpose of the corporation is to facilitate fundraising, to secure broad community ownership of the Children’s Initiative, and, if the area selected by the governing body is designated as a Children’s Initiative, to:

- A. Begin to transfer responsibility for planning from the planning team to the corporation.
- B. Begin the implementation and governance of the Children’s Initiative community plan.

### III. Submitting a Request

The municipality and/or county seeking the designation should submit the following items to the Ounce of Prevention Fund:

1. A copy of the resolution approved by the appropriate governmental entity.
2. The boundary lines of the proposed Children's Initiative area.
3. A description of the social and economic challenges that currently exist in the area.
4. A roster of the planning team including name, position held in the community, address, telephone number, and email address.
5. A roster of each workgroup including name, position held in the community, address, telephone number, and email address.
6. The community strategic plan developed by the planning team and approved by the governmental entity.
7. Documents of incorporation for the Children's Initiative corporation.
8. A roster of the board of directors of the Children's Initiative corporation including name, position held in the community, address, telephone number, and email address.
9. Current year budget for the Children's Initiative corporation.
10. Children's Initiative corporation by-laws.
11. Children's Initiative corporation policies and procedures manual.
12. Letters of support from organizations and agencies identifying resources that are located within the Children's Initiative.
13. A statement of financial need requesting support from the state of Florida.

**Submit the designation request and supporting documents to:**

The Ounce of Prevention Fund of Florida  
Attention: Winifred P. Heggins  
111 N. Gadsden Street  
Tallahassee, FL 32301  
[wheggins@ounce.org](mailto:wheggins@ounce.org)  
850-921-4494