

Title XI

COUNTY ORGANIZATION AND INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

Chapter 125

COUNTY GOVERNMENT

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125.901 Children's services; independent special district; council; powers, duties, and functions; public records exemption.—

(1) Each county may by ordinance create an independent special district, as defined in ss. 189.012 and 200.001(8)(e), to provide funding for children's services throughout the county in accordance with this section. The boundaries of such district shall be coterminous with the boundaries of the county. The county governing body shall obtain approval, by a majority vote of those electors voting on the question, to annually levy ad valorem taxes which shall not exceed the maximum millage rate authorized by this section. Any district created pursuant to the provisions of this subsection shall be required to levy and fix millage subject to the provisions of s. 200.065. Once such millage is approved by the electorate, the district shall not be required to seek approval of the electorate in future years to levy the previously approved millage.

(a) The governing body of the district shall be a council on children's services, which may also be known as a juvenile welfare board or similar name as established in the ordinance by the county governing body. Such council shall consist of 10 members, including: the superintendent of schools; a local school board member; the district administrator from the appropriate district of the Department of Children and Families, or his or her designee who is a member of the Senior Management Service or of the Selected Exempt Service; one member of the county governing body; and the judge assigned to juvenile cases who shall sit as a voting member of the board, except that said judge shall not vote or participate in the setting of ad valorem taxes under this section. If there is more than one judge assigned to juvenile cases in a county, the chief judge shall designate one of said juvenile judges to serve on the board. The remaining five members shall be appointed by the Governor, and shall, to the extent possible, represent the demographic diversity of the population of the county. After soliciting recommendations from the public, the county governing body shall submit to the Governor the names of at least three persons for each vacancy occurring among the five members appointed by the Governor, and the Governor shall appoint members to the council from the candidates nominated by the county governing body. The Governor shall make a selection within a 45-day period or request a new list of candidates. All members appointed by the Governor shall have been residents of the county for the previous 24-month period. Such members shall be appointed for 4-year terms, except that the length of the terms of the initial appointees shall be adjusted to stagger the terms. The Governor may remove a member for cause or upon the written petition of the county governing body. If any of the members of the council required to be appointed by the Governor under the provisions of this subsection shall resign, die, or be removed from office, the vacancy thereby created shall, as soon as

practicable, be filled by appointment by the Governor, using the same method as the original appointment, and such appointment to fill a vacancy shall be for the unexpired term of the person who resigns, dies, or is removed from office.

(b) However, any county as defined in s. 125.011(1) may instead have a governing body consisting of 33 members, including: the superintendent of schools, or his or her designee; two representatives of public postsecondary education institutions located in the county; the county manager or the equivalent county officer; the district administrator from the appropriate district of the Department of Children and Families, or the administrator's designee who is a member of the Senior Management Service or the Selected Exempt Service; the director of the county health department or the director's designee; the state attorney for the county or the state attorney's designee; the chief judge assigned to juvenile cases, or another juvenile judge who is the chief judge's designee and who shall sit as a voting member of the board, except that the judge may not vote or participate in setting ad valorem taxes under this section; an individual who is selected by the board of the local United Way or its equivalent; a member of a locally recognized faith-based coalition, selected by that coalition; a member of the local chamber of commerce, selected by that chamber or, if more than one chamber exists within the county, a person selected by a coalition of the local chambers; a member of the early learning coalition, selected by that coalition; a representative of a labor organization or union active in the county; a member of a local alliance or coalition engaged in cross-system planning for health and social service delivery in the county, selected by that alliance or coalition; a member of the local Parent-Teachers Association/Parent-Teacher-Student Association, selected by that association; a youth representative selected by the local school system's student government; a local school board member appointed by the chair of the school board; the mayor of the county or the mayor's designee; one member of the county governing body, appointed by the chair of that body; a member of the state Legislature who represents residents of the county, selected by the chair of the local legislative delegation; an elected official representing the residents of a municipality in the county, selected by the county municipal league; and 4 members-at-large, appointed to the council by the majority of sitting council members. The remaining 7 members shall be appointed by the Governor in accordance with procedures set forth in paragraph (a), except that the Governor may remove a member for cause or upon the written petition of the council. Appointments by the Governor must, to the extent reasonably possible, represent the geographic and demographic diversity of the population of the county. Members who are appointed to the council by reason of their position are not subject to the length of terms and limits on consecutive terms as provided in this section. The remaining appointed members of the governing body shall be appointed to serve 2-year terms, except that those members appointed by the Governor shall be appointed to serve 4-year terms, and the youth representative and the legislative delegate shall be appointed to serve 1-year terms. A member may be reappointed; however, a member may not serve for more than three consecutive terms. A member is eligible to be appointed again after a 2-year hiatus from the council.

(c) This subsection does not prohibit a county from exercising such power as is provided by general or special law to provide children's services or to create a special district to provide such services.

(2)(a) Each council on children's services shall have all of the following powers and functions:

1. To provide and maintain in the county such preventive, developmental, treatment, and rehabilitative services for children as the council determines are needed for the general welfare of the county.

2. To provide such other services for all children as the council determines are needed for the general welfare of the county.
3. To allocate and provide funds for other agencies in the county which are operated for the benefit of children, provided they are not under the exclusive jurisdiction of the public school system.
4. To collect information and statistical data and to conduct research which will be helpful to the council and the county in deciding the needs of children in the county.
5. To consult and coordinate with other agencies dedicated to the welfare of children to the end that the overlapping of services will be prevented.
6. To lease or buy such real estate, equipment, and personal property and to construct such buildings as are needed to execute the foregoing powers and functions, provided that no such purchases shall be made or building done unless paid for with cash on hand or secured by funds deposited in financial institutions. Nothing in this subparagraph shall be construed to authorize a district to issue bonds of any nature, nor shall a district have the power to require the imposition of any bond by the governing body of the county.
7. To employ, pay, and provide benefits for any part-time or full-time personnel needed to execute the foregoing powers and functions.

(b) Each council on children's services shall:

1. Immediately after the members are appointed, elect a chair and a vice chair from among its members, and elect other officers as deemed necessary by the council.
2. Immediately after the members are appointed and officers are elected, identify and assess the needs of the children in the county served by the council and submit to the governing body of each county a written description of:
  - a. The activities, services, and opportunities that will be provided to children.
  - b. The anticipated schedule for providing those activities, services, and opportunities.
  - c. The manner in which children will be served, including a description of arrangements and agreements which will be made with community organizations, state and local educational agencies, federal agencies, public assistance agencies, the juvenile courts, foster care agencies, and other applicable public and private agencies and organizations.
  - d. The special outreach efforts that will be undertaken to provide services to at-risk, abused, or neglected children.
  - e. The manner in which the council will seek and provide funding for unmet needs.
  - f. The strategy which will be used for interagency coordination to maximize existing human and fiscal resources.
3. Provide training and orientation to all new members sufficient to allow them to perform their duties.

4. Make and adopt bylaws and rules and regulations for the council's guidance, operation, governance, and maintenance, provided such rules and regulations are not inconsistent with federal or state laws or county ordinances.

5. Provide an annual written report, to be presented no later than January 1, to the governing body of the county. The annual report shall contain, but not be limited to, the following information:

a. Information on the effectiveness of activities, services, and programs offered by the council, including cost-effectiveness.

b. A detailed anticipated budget for continuation of activities, services, and programs offered by the council, and a list of all sources of requested funding, both public and private.

c. Procedures used for early identification of at-risk children who need additional or continued services and methods for ensuring that the additional or continued services are received.

d. A description of the degree to which the council's objectives and activities are consistent with the goals of this section.

e. Detailed information on the various programs, services, and activities available to participants and the degree to which the programs, services, and activities have been successfully used by children.

f. Information on programs, services, and activities that should be eliminated; programs, services, and activities that should be continued; and programs, services, and activities that should be added to the basic format of the children's services council.

(c) The council shall maintain minutes of each meeting, including a record of all votes cast, and shall make such minutes available to any interested person.

(d) Members of the council shall serve without compensation, but shall be entitled to receive reimbursement for per diem and travel expenses consistent with the provisions of s. 112.061.

(3)(a) The fiscal year of the district shall be the same as that of the county.

(b) On or before July 1 of each year, the council on children's services shall prepare a tentative annual written budget of the district's expected income and expenditures, including a contingency fund. The council shall, in addition, compute a proposed millage rate within the voter-approved cap necessary to fund the tentative budget and, prior to adopting a final budget, comply with the provisions of s. 200.065, relating to the method of fixing millage, and shall fix the final millage rate by resolution of the council. The adopted budget and final millage rate shall be certified and delivered to the governing body of the county as soon as possible following the council's adoption of the final budget and millage rate pursuant to chapter 200. Included in each certified budget shall be the millage rate, adopted by resolution of the council, necessary to be applied to raise the funds budgeted for district operations and expenditures. In no circumstances, however, shall any district levy millage to exceed a maximum of 0.5 mills of assessed valuation of all properties within the county which are subject to ad valorem county taxes.

(c) The budget of the district so certified and delivered to the governing body of the county shall not be subject to change or modification by the governing body of the county or any other authority.

(d) All tax money collected under this section, as soon after the collection thereof as is reasonably practicable, shall be paid directly to the council on children's services by the tax collector of the county, or the clerk of the circuit court if the clerk collects delinquent taxes.

(e)1. All moneys received by the council on children's services shall be deposited in qualified public depositories, as defined in s. 280.02, with separate and distinguishable accounts established specifically for the council and shall be withdrawn only by checks signed by the chair of the council and countersigned by either one other member of the council on children's services or by a chief executive officer who shall be so authorized by the council.

2. Upon entering the duties of office, the chair and the other member of the council or chief executive officer who signs its checks shall each give a surety bond in the sum of at least \$1,000 for each \$1 million or portion thereof of the council's annual budget, which bond shall be conditioned that each shall faithfully discharge the duties of his or her office. The premium on such bond may be paid by the district as part of the expense of the council. No other member of the council shall be required to give bond or other security.

3. No funds of the district shall be expended except by check as aforesaid, except expenditures from a petty cash account which shall not at any time exceed \$100. All expenditures from petty cash shall be recorded on the books and records of the council on children's services. No funds of the council on children's services, excepting expenditures from petty cash, shall be expended without prior approval of the council, in addition to the budgeting thereof.

(f) Within 10 days, exclusive of weekends and legal holidays, after the expiration of each quarter annual period, the council on children's services shall cause to be prepared and filed with the governing body of the county a financial report which shall include the following:

1. The total expenditures of the council for the quarter annual period.
2. The total receipts of the council during the quarter annual period.
3. A statement of the funds the council has on hand, has invested, or has deposited with qualified public depositories at the end of the quarter annual period.
4. The total administrative costs of the council for the quarter annual period.

(4)(a) Any district created pursuant to this section may be dissolved by a special act of the Legislature, or the county governing body may by ordinance dissolve the district subject to the approval of the electorate.

(b)1.a. Notwithstanding paragraph (a), the governing body of the county shall submit the question of retention or dissolution of a district with voter-approved taxing authority to the electorate in the general election according to the following schedule:

(I) For a district in existence on July 1, 2010, and serving a county with a population of 400,000 or fewer persons as of that date.....2014.

(II) For a district in existence on July 1, 2010, and serving a county with a population of 2 million or more persons as of that date, unless the governing body of the county has previously submitted such question voluntarily to the electorate for a second time since 2005,.....2020.

b. A referendum by the electorate on or after July 1, 2010, creating a new district with taxing authority may specify that the district is not subject to reauthorization or may specify the number of years for which the initial authorization shall remain effective. If the referendum does not prescribe terms of reauthorization, the governing body of the county shall submit the question of retention or dissolution of the district to the electorate in the general election 12 years after the initial authorization.

2. The governing body of the district may specify, and submit to the governing body of the county no later than 9 months before the scheduled election, that the district is not subsequently subject to reauthorization or may specify the number of years for which a reauthorization under this paragraph shall remain effective. If the governing body of the district makes such specification and submission, the governing body of the county shall include that information in the question submitted to the electorate. If the governing body of the district does not specify and submit such information, the governing body of the county shall resubmit the question of reauthorization to the electorate every 12 years after the year prescribed in subparagraph 1. The governing body of the district may recommend to the governing body of the county language for the question submitted to the electorate.

3. Nothing in this paragraph limits the authority to dissolve a district as provided under paragraph (a).

4. Nothing in this paragraph precludes the governing body of a district from requesting that the governing body of the county submit the question of retention or dissolution of a district with voter-approved taxing authority to the electorate at a date earlier than the year prescribed in subparagraph 1. If the governing body of the county accepts the request and submits the question to the electorate, the governing body satisfies the requirement of that subparagraph.

If any district is dissolved pursuant to this subsection, each county must first obligate itself to assume the debts, liabilities, contracts, and outstanding obligations of the district within the total millage available to the county governing body for all county and municipal purposes as provided for under s. 9, Art. VII of the State Constitution. Any district may also be dissolved pursuant to part VII of chapter 189.

(5) After or during the first year of operation of the council on children's services, the governing body of the county, at its option, may fund in whole or in part the budget of the council on children's services from its own funds.

(6) Any district created pursuant to the provisions of this section shall comply with all other statutory requirements of general application which relate to the filing of any financial reports or compliance reports required under part III of chapter 218, or any other report or documentation required by law, including the requirements of ss. 189.015, 189.016, and 189.08.

(7)(a) Each county may by ordinance create a dependent special district within the boundaries of the county for the purpose of providing preventive, developmental, treatment, and rehabilitative services for children. The district is authorized to seek grants from state, federal, and local agencies and to accept donations from public and private sources, provided that the district complies with the provisions of paragraphs (1)(a) and (2)(b), and provided that the district has a budget that requires approval through an affirmative vote of the governing body of the county or may be vetoed by the governing body of the county.

(b) If the provisions of a county charter relating to the membership of the governing board of a dependent special district conflict with paragraph (1)(a), a county may by ordinance create a dependent special district within the boundaries of the county for the purpose of providing preventive, developmental, treatment, and rehabilitative services for children and the district shall be authorized to seek grants from state, federal, and local agencies and to accept donations from public and private sources, provided that the district complies with the provisions of paragraph (2)(b), and provided that the district has a budget that requires approval through an affirmative vote of the governing body of the county or may be vetoed by the governing body of the county.

(8) It is the intent of the Legislature that the funds collected pursuant to the provisions of this section shall be used to support improvements in children's services and that such funds shall not be used as a substitute for existing resources or for resources that would otherwise be available for children's services.

(9) Two or more councils on children's services may enter into a cooperative agreement to share administrative costs, including, but not limited to, staff and office space, if a more efficient or effective operation will result. The cooperative agreement shall include provisions on apportioning costs between the councils, keeping separate and distinct financial records for each council, and resolving any conflicts that might arise under the cooperative agreement.

(10) Two or more councils on children's services may enter into a cooperative agreement to seek grants, to accept donations, or to jointly fund programs serving multicounty areas. The cooperative agreement shall include provisions for the adequate accounting of separate and joint funds.

(11) Personal identifying information of a child or the parent or guardian of the child, held by a council on children's services, juvenile welfare board, or other similar entity created under this section or by special law, or held by a service provider or researcher under contract with such entity, is exempt from s. 119.07(1) and s. 24(a), Art. I of the State Constitution. This exemption applies to such information held before, on, or after the effective date of this exemption.

History.—ss. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, ch. 86-197; s. 26, ch. 89-379; s. 30, ch. 90-288; s. 825, ch. 95-147; s. 2, ch. 97-255; s. 12, ch. 99-8; s. 141, ch. 2001-266; s. 1, ch. 2002-238; s. 1, ch. 2004-86; s. 5, ch. 2004-484; s. 24, ch. 2008-4; s. 1, ch. 2009-151; s. 33, ch. 2010-210; s. 35, ch. 2014-19; s. 5, ch. 2014-22; s. 3, ch. 2015-79; s. 68, ch. 2017-116; s. 25, ch. 2017-151.