

STATE OF OKLAHOMA

1st Session of the 48th Legislature (2001)

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE
FOR
HOUSE BILL NO. 1379

By: Reese

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE

(Public health and safety - Strengthening Marriage
and Oklahoma Families Voucher Program -
codification -

effective date)

BE IT ENACTED BY THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF OKLAHOMA:

SECTION 1. NEW LAW A new section of law to be codified
in the Oklahoma Statutes as Section 115 of Title 63, unless there is
created a duplication in numbering, reads as follows:

A. The Oklahoma Legislature recognizes that:

1. The state has a fundamental interest in ensuring that
Oklahoma children reside in loving, stable, traditional, two-
parent marital family homes. Social science research confirms that
marriage creates the safest place for children to flourish and the
most practical way for children to enjoy full emotional, moral, and
financial protection of both parents, and our children represent the
future of this country;

2. Just as the family is the foundation of society, the marital
relationship is the foundation of the family. Consequently,
encouraging marriages and strengthening marriages can only lead to
stronger families, children and communities, as well as a stronger
economy;

3. An inability to cope with stress from both internal and
external sources leads to significantly higher incidence of domestic
violence, child abuse, absenteeism, medical costs, learning and

social deficiencies and divorce. Research shows that men and women who marry and remain married live longer, healthier, wealthier, more satisfying lives;

4. Relationship skills can be learned;

5. Once learned, relationship skills can facilitate communication between parties to a marriage and assist couples in avoiding conflict;

6. Once relationship skills are learned, they are generalized to parenting, the workplace, schools, neighborhoods, and civic relationships;

7. By reducing conflict and increasing communication, stressors can be diminished and coping can be furthered; and

8. When effective coping exists, domestic violence, child abuse, and divorce and its effect on children, such as absenteeism, medical costs, and learning and social deficiencies, are diminished.

B. It is the intent of the Oklahoma Legislature to establish a voucher program to encourage parents of children born out of wedlock to attend a marriage counseling program and to assist them in establishing a loving, stable, traditional two-parent marital family home for their children.

C. There is hereby established within the State Department of Health, the Strengthening Marriage and Oklahoma Families Voucher Program.

D. Subject to the availability of funds, the Department of Health shall, within six (6) months of the effective date of this act, design and implement a voucher program for payment of approved costs associated with the marriage ceremony of mothers of children born out of wedlock or for both parents of a child born out of wedlock who attended a marriage counseling program authorized by this section.

E. 1. The State Board of Health shall promulgate rules to implement the provisions of the Strengthening Marriage and Oklahoma Families Voucher Program.

2. The Program shall allow vouchers to be given for costs associated with the marriage ceremony not to exceed Two Hundred Fifty Dollars (\$250.00) of a mother of a child born out of wedlock or for both parents of a child born out of wedlock if such parent or parents attended at least five marriage counseling classes authorized by this section. Payment on this voucher shall only be made after one (1) year of marriage has been completed.

3. The Board shall offer or provide for marriage counseling for persons specified by this section. The marriage counseling program shall be based on criteria developed by the Statewide Marriage Initiative.

4. The Board shall establish by rule the mechanism and procedures for payment or reimbursement for vouchers. The procedures established shall allow the local health departments to provide vouchers and/or payment for vouchers presented to them.

SECTION 2. This act shall become effective November 1, 2001.

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