STATE OF OKLAHOMA

1st Session of the 48th Legislature (2001)

HOUSE BILL HB1379 By: Reese

AS INTRODUCED

An Act relating to public health and safety; creating the Strengthening Marriage and Oklahoma Families Voucher Program; providing legislative intent; establishing the Program within the Oklahoma State Department of Health; providing for promulgation of rules; providing certain restrictions; providing for certification; providing for codification; and declaring an emergency.

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 incidents 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 premarital 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 of a premarital and postmarital counseling program for mothers of children born out of wedlock or for both parents of a child born out of wedlock and payment to eligible parents of children born out of wedlock for approved costs associated with a marriage ceremony.

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 per person or per couple for:

a. not more than three premarital counseling classes,

b. not more than three postmarital counseling classes within the first year of marriage, and

c. costs associated with a marriage ceremony not to exceed Five Hundred Dollars ($500.00). Payment on this voucher shall only be made after one (1) year of marriage has been completed.

3. The Board shall establish certification standards for persons or entities authorized to provide premarital or postmarital counseling.

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. It being immediately necessary for the preservation of the public peace, health and safety, an emergency is hereby declared to exist, by reason whereof this act shall take effect and be in full force from and after its passage and approval.

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