



Please help us save First Steps which is still in jeopardy.

A closer look at two problems with Senate Bill 500:

1. Subject to annual appropriations.

Governor Blunt's education pledge was to "never spend less on education than the year before." In his state of the state address he said: "So that all Missouri children can reach their full potential, we must make education our highest public policy and budget priority."

Senate Bill 500 is subject to appropriations which means each year this program is at risk of losing its funding. As of today, there is only \$1 million in the First Steps budget, \$26 million more is needed.

2. Change doesn't mean improvement and will cost more.

In 1998 a consultant was hired at a cost of over a million dollars and thousands of hours to do a comprehensive redesign of First Steps. These improvements started becoming effective in 10/04 and are already saving taxpayers a substantial amount of money. But many are just being implemented. For instance, as of 3/1/05, the First Steps Central Finance Operation has moved to a complete paperless system - no more printing and mailing of paper authorizations, checks and claims. All of these are now submitted electronically.

Currently less than 6% of the First Steps budget goes to direct administration costs making this successful program also very efficient. Senate Bill 500 - crafted in a few short weeks - throws away all these cost-savings and program improvements by creating a completely different program model involving ten regional systems.

Senate Bill 500 offers no cost savings projections for this "reform" which in reality will cost taxpayers more to set-up and then administer since administrative duties will have to be duplicated at all ten areas. Even worse, if ten different regional providers replace the current First Steps model, we will lose our uniform system that ensures quality, consistency and equity statewide for all families.

Save First Steps Coalition

Please join us in Jeff City on Tuesday, 3/15.

For more information and updates, please visit SaveFirstSteps.com or call Malinda Terreri (314) 488-0494.

1. Critical: Join us in Jefferson City on 3/15 for a press conference at 11AM and the Senate public hearing on Bill 500 at noon. Show your support and bring family and friends.

2. Call government leaders and let them know Senate Bill 500 isn't the right answer. Tell them First Steps:

- * Should be fully funded and not subject to appropriations.
- * Should proceed with the current redesign improvements and not the Governor's expensive rebidding process and regional centers plan.
- * Should establish a fair sliding fee schedule for low income families. SB 500 charges monthly fees to families making as little as \$5000 annually.
- * Should be consistent with Part C of the IDEA in which copayments will be covered by federal funds, otherwise parents will have to pay copayments totalling up to \$4575 annually. And no premium increases tied to insurance coverage of early intervention.

You can find many more details at SaveFirstSteps.com. These are some of the people to call:

Gov. Blunt at (573) 751-3222
Rod Jetton at (573) 751-5912
Carl Bearden at (573) 751-2949
Brad Lager at (573) 751-9465
Tom Dempsey at (573) 751-1141
Michael Gibbons at (573) 751-2853
Charlie Shields at (573) 751-9476

3. Send a Letter to the Editor of your paper and share your concerns regarding Senate Bill 500.

4. Share a copy of this flyer with your friends, family, pediatrician, teachers, therapists and daycare providers and ask them to help.