



*Nothing is politically right
that is morally wrong.*

MISSOURI SENATE
JEFFERSON CITY

*Free and fair discussion
is the firmest friend of truth.*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 20, 2005

**Senate Votes to Move Legislation Reforming and Saving
First Steps Program to the House**

JEFFERSON CITY – The Senate third read and gave final approval today to legislation reforming a program that provides 8,000 developmentally disabled Missouri infants and toddlers with early intervention services. Senate President Pro Tem Michael Gibbons, R-Kirkwood, sponsored Senate Bill 500 which protects and improves the state’s First Steps program.

“This bill preserves and protects the program and makes it more cost effective for the taxpayers,” Gibbons said. “The savings generated from these reforms will help ensure this valuable children’s program is not on the chopping block year after year.”

SB 500 shifts oversight of care services to regional centers that would be created under the bill. Other aspects, including billing of providers, would remain centralized under the direction of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Another reform aspect is the introduction of a participation fee based on a family’s income and size. Families that qualify for Medicaid would not be subject to the fee while other families would pay between \$5 and \$100 per month on a sliding scale. Also, those families that are deemed “unable to pay” by new program guidelines would be exempt from paying the participation fee.

“We heard from several therapists that a minimal participation fee would encourage a better partnership between care providers and the families seeking services for their children,” Gibbons said. “By engaging sources of payment outside of the state program, including requiring insurance companies to cover these early services, we will give parents more options and help more children with less cost to the state.”

The bill mandates private health insurance companies to provide coverage of early intervention services for children medically diagnosed with delayed development. The measure calls for coverage up to \$3,000 a year per child, with a total of \$9,000 over three years.

SB 500 has an emergency clause that was approved by the Senate meaning the reforms will take affect upon the governor’s signature. The bill now moves to the House where it will receive similar consideration.

###

Farrah Fite, Senate Majority Caucus Communications Director
(573) 751-1562
ffite@senate.mo.gov