



*Nothing is politically right
that is morally wrong.*

MISSOURI SENATE
JEFFERSON CITY

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Senate President Pro Tem Michael Gibbons Sponsors Legislation to Reform and Save First Steps Program

JEFFERSON CITY – In an effort to prevent more than 8,000 developmentally disabled Missouri infants and toddlers from losing access to a program that offers early intervention services, Senate President Pro Tem Michael Gibbons, R - Kirkwood, today sponsored legislation to continue a reformed version of the state’s First Steps program.

“By examining this program, we have found that we can serve these children and at the same time make it cost effective for the taxpayer,” Gibbons said. “By working together with the Governor and the House, we can give these kids better and more efficient care.”

One of the primary reforms of the program is the introduction of a 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 no more than \$100 per month. Also, those families that are deemed unable to pay by new program guidelines would still receive services.

“Those families that have no other options will be guaranteed treatment,” Gibbons said. “But the families who do have other means, especially medical insurance, will now be asked to rely on those resources as well.”

Currently, the First Steps program has no income cap meaning all participants are covered at the state’s expense. Senate Bill 500 will mandate private health insurance companies to provide coverage of early intervention services. Health benefit plans would be expected to cover these services without passing deductibles or co-payments on to their recipients. The measure calls for coverage up to \$3,000 a year per child, with a total of \$9,000 over three years.

Gibbons says the program’s benefits to children were never in question, but constituents who had participated in the program shared concerns of misdirected funds.

“I had parents who praised the system, but at the same time told me of cases where they questioned how the money was spent,” Gibbons said. “Now, the department of Elementary and Secondary education will oversee a more efficient system that will identify those kids who need this early intervention.”

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