



Senate Approves Bill Enhancing Services for Disabled Children

JEFFERSON CITY — Ensuring Missouri's First Steps program for developmentally disabled children receives the attention it deserves is extremely important to me. That is why I was pleased that the Senate this week approved my bill protecting First Steps and instituting a pilot program to improve services.

Senate Bill 112 ensures that Missouri's early intervention program for infants and toddlers with disabilities will not be affected by the Missouri Sunset Act, which sunsets new programs after six years unless they are re-authorized.

In addition, SB 112 institutes a pilot program to enhance First Steps' ability to promote the program to eligible families. The First Steps Child Find system is charged with identifying, locating and evaluating infants and toddlers who qualify for the program. My legislation institutes a part-time Child Find coordinator in the Greater St. Louis system to ensure Child Find and First Steps are not missing eligible children. This position would be funded by the Part C Early Intervention Pilot Program Fund.

First Steps is the state's early intervention program for young children with developmental disabilities. The purpose of First Steps is to help families improve their child's development, learning and participation in family and community life.

A recent state audit found that Missouri is nearly last in the nation in providing First Steps services. Missouri is more restrictive in offering these services than all but two other states, and we are sixth to last in the percentage of children enrolled in First Steps. The provisions in SB 112 shore up First Steps services and ensure Missouri children are not left behind.

If you have comments or questions about this week's column or any other matter involving state government, please do not hesitate to contact me. You can reach my office by phone at (866) 271-2844.

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