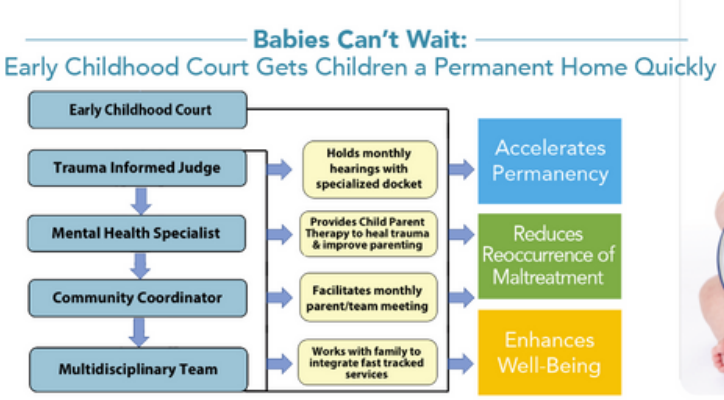
Florida's Early Childhood Courts

WHAT IS EARLY CHILDHOOD COURT?

Florida's ECC, fondly called "baby court" is a proven pathway of hope and prosperity for maltreating families with young children. Intervening in the pivotal early years is the most effective time to hardwire the brain for health and well-being, Florida's ECC is based on the evidence-based Safe Baby Court Teams, now in over 100 sites across the nation.

WHY AREN'T ALL KIDS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD COURT?

- No dedicated funding source.
- Wide-spread vacancies due to noncompetitive salaries.
- Florida's billion dollar opioid settlement has not been earmarked for ECC although 82% of removals are forsubstance use; 25% specifically for opioids.



HOW MANY BABIES ARE IN STATE CARE?

Of the **16,158** Florida children in "out of home care", **3680 were under age 3**, with babies being the largest single age group, as of 1/31/25. Of these, only 304 children ages 0-3 are currently in Early Childhood Court.

ECC OFFERS BETTER OUTCOMES FOR BABIES

Multiple evaluations show compelling outcomes for families served by ECC as compared with traditiona ldependency court:

- More likely to be reunified and more quickly
- Improved child safety and well-being
- Achieving timely permanency **(117 fewer days in care)**
- Breaking the intergenerational cycle of maltreatment **(3.7% fewer re-enter care)***

https://www.flcourts.gov/Resources-Services/Office-of-Problem-Solving-Courts/Early-Childhood-Courts

Florida TaxWatch Projects Millions in Saving from Early Childhood Court (2020)

	Total Labor Costs	Total Out-of-Home Costs	Total Recidivism Costs	Total Cost
Traditional Courts	$297.2 million	$140.1 million	$55.9 million	$493.4 million
Early Childhood Courts (ECC)	$242.7 million	$111.9 million	$25.1 million	$379.8 million
Total Savings	**$54.5 million**	**$28.3 million**	**$30.8 million**	**$113.6 million**

March 10, 2025

WHAT WOULD IT TAKE FOR EVERY CHILD IN CARE TO ACCESS FLORIDA'S EARLY CHILDHOOD COURT?

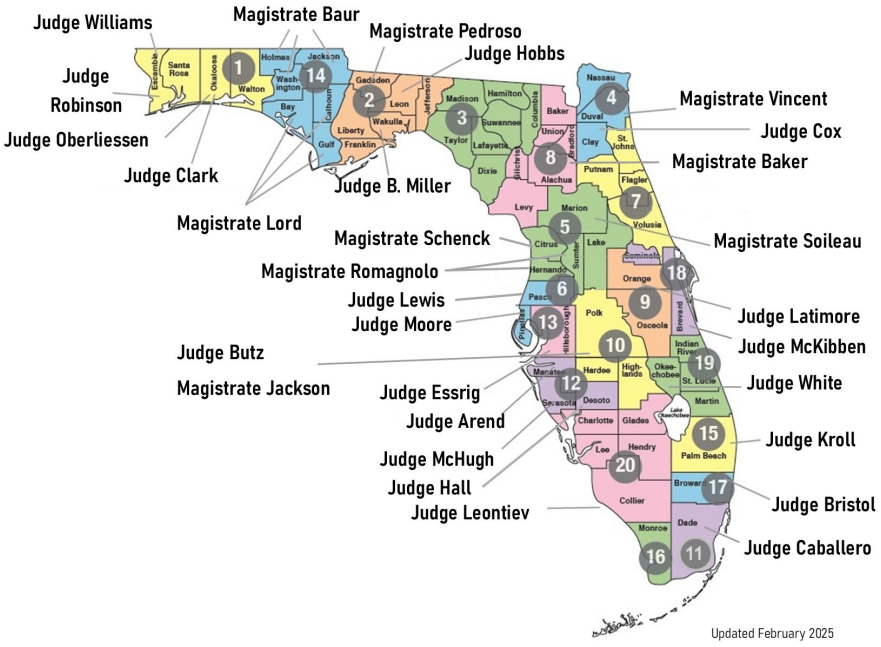
- **Over 4 years, phase-in capacity from 34 teams currently to 122 teams to serve all 3680 children statewide in care.**
- **Invest for 4 years to then be self-sustaining.**
- **Each year's investment is offset by savings achieved through the cost avoidance of children in out-of-home care and re-entering care.**
- **DCF should administer the funding allocations statewide and monitor the impact of OHC expenditure reduction to continue the program beyond the 4 year investment to ensure funds are reinvested to fully cover the cost of the program after 4 years.**

MULTIDISCIPLINARY APPROACH

ECC teams are trained in the trauma informed ECC approach working together to fast track supports for babies and their families to promote a stable permanent home. ECC teams consists of:

- Trauma trained Judge
- Early Childhood Court Coordinator (Court Admin.)
- Therapist trained in Child Parent Psychotherapy
- Access to certified and trained Peer Specialist (parent)
- Dedicated and ECC trained Case Manager
- Dedicated and ECC trained DCF Attorney

FLORIDA'S 34 ECC SITES



ANNUAL FUNDING ALLOCATION BREAKDOWN

This funding model allow for:

- Dedicated ECC coordinators, case managers, therapists and attorneys to staff the model at competitive salaries.
- Lower caseloads for the intensity of the model: 14:1 case manager, 40:1 for the DCF Attorney, and 10:1 for therapist.
- Enhanced rates to parents' attorneys for increased court hearings.
- Infrastructure supports (training and evaluation capacity) to ensure program accountability and fidelity.

BI-PARTISAN SUPPORT

Florida's Early Childhood Courts have earned bi-partisan support including Florida's Governor's Office, Office of Planning & Budget, DCF, Community Based Care, Florida TaxWatch, Health Plans, Children's Home Society, Judicial partners, court teams, GALs, community partners, and more.

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