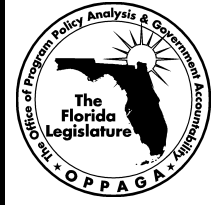




Office of Program Policy Analysis And Government Accountability



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Follow-Up Report on the Division of Blind Services Administered by the Department of Labor and Employment Security

Abstract

- The Legislature adopted our recommendation and transferred the Division of Blind Services from the Department of Education to the Department of Labor and Employment Security.
- The Department of Labor and Employment Security has assessed a lower indirect cost rate to the division for administrative purposes, allowing more federal funds to be used for client services.
- The Legislature did not move the Braille and Talking Book Library for the Blind to the Department of State, as we recommended, but relocated it to the Department of Labor and Employment Security with other blind services.
- The Division of Blind Services has developed comprehensive performance measures as we recommended and proposed that they be used in performance-based program budgeting for the 1998-99 fiscal year.

Purpose

In accordance with s. 11.45(7)(f), F.S., this follow-up report informs the Legislature of actions taken by the Division of Blind Services in response to our Report No. 94-23. This report presents our assessment of the extent to which the Division has addressed the findings and recommendations included in our report.

In addition, because many of our recommendations were directed to the Legislature, we also chose to report on Legislative actions taken as a result of our analysis.

Background

The provision of government services to the blind began in 1920, when the United States Congress passed legislation for vocational rehabilitation of the disabled. In 1936, Congress passed additional legislation to give blind persons employment operating vending facilities in federal buildings.

Florida has a long history of services to the blind. The Program provides several services based on the needs of individuals with a vision impairment. These services include: Vocational Rehabilitation (services and training that allow individuals to return or enter employment), independent living services, the Braille and Talking Book Library, and the Business Enterprise Program.

Florida's Blind Services are organized as a Division under the Department of Labor and Employment Security. The program's goal is to work with blind individuals to achieve maximum levels of independence, employment and integration into the community.

Prior Findings

The Blind Services program provides three specific services: (1) Client Services which provides vocational rehabilitation, independent living services, and services to children and families; (2) the Braille and Talking Book Library; and (3) the Vending Facility Program. We were directed, pursuant to Section 5, Ch. 94-238, Laws of Florida, to conduct a performance audit of blind services and make recommendations on the organizational placement of these services.

Recommendations to Legislature

- Transfer Client Services which provides vocational rehabilitation and independent living services from the Department of Education to the Department of Labor and Employment Security as a separate division. While we stated that both departments provided adequate placements, the Department of Labor and Employment Security would charge the program a lower indirect cost rate, allowing the program to use more of its federal funding to serve clients;
- Maintain the Vending Facility Program with the Client Services Program to provide support services to the vendors.
- If other recommendations were followed, the Braille and Talking Book Library should be placed in the Department of State because of its experience in providing library services.

Recommendations to Agency

- Develop formal goals that relate to the program's mission.
- Adopt performance measures that relate accomplishments to goals.
- Develop benchmarks to evaluate progress over time.
- Continue to privatize client services to the maximum extent allowed under federal law.

While the Division had developed some goals and objectives for some of its services, it had neither a comprehensive plan nor adequate performance measures. The program has a history of successfully using private vendors to provide many client services. Additional services could be provided by these vendors. However, it would not be viable to privatize the Library for the Blind and the Vending Facilities Program.

Current Status

Actions Taken

Client Services Program. As recommended, the Legislature relocated the Client Services Program from the Department of Education to the Department of Labor

and Employment Security. For 1996-97, the Department of Labor and Employment Security assessed a fee of \$735,294 (8% of the federal rehabilitation funds) for administrative purposes. Under the Department of Education, this assessment was \$1.3 million in 1993-94 (15.4%). This lower assessment has allowed the division to make more of its federal funds available for client services.

The division must however pay a new administrative fee under the Department of Labor and Employment Security. Section 215.20, F.S., requires most agencies to pay a service charge of 7% of all revenue of an income nature deposited in trust funds to pay for the cost of general government. The Department of Education is exempt from this provision. In 1996-97 the charge was \$87,807 to the division. Currently the program draws down all the federal rehabilitation funds set aside for blind vocational rehabilitation services for Florida. In the past, the program has been able to draw down additional federal funds from a pool of funds that other states did not match. The assessment against the program's state general revenues will inhibit its ability to draw down these additional dollars unless the other methods, such as in-kind contributions can be successfully used as match.

Vending Facility Program. As recommended, the Vending Facility Program remains with the Client Services Program and is now administered by the Department of Labor and Employment Security.

Braille and Talking Book Library. The library was relocated from the Department of Education to the Department of Labor and Employment Security.

Performance Measures. The Department proposed performance measures for the Division of Blind Services in its performance-based program budget request for the 1998-99 fiscal year. We reviewed these measures and they were found to be comprehensive in covering key functions. However, past performance data on many of these measures was not available for many of these measures. This lack of data will make it more difficult for the Legislature to use these measures to set performance standards.

Privatization. The program continues to privatize client services where appropriate. This has included janitorial services and counselor and nursing positions.

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