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The Evening Star

## SEA 529 addresses several facets of childcare, healthcare

Law mandates department of education to assess children's behavioral health

BY CINDY BEVINGTON

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It sailed through the Indiana General Assembly with only one dissent in 2005, but in the past few weeks Senate Enrolled Act 529 and portions of it have received national attention.

The law addresses several facets of childcare — one of its main points was to separate certain child services from the

Family and Social Services Administration and to set up a stand-alone arm of government charged with the oversight of Indiana's children. But the section that is drawing the ire of conservatives, civil rights proponents and even some of the legislators who passed the law, is the section directing the DOE to work together with the Department of Child Services, the Department of Correction and the Division of Mental Health and Addiction to develop and coordinate a children's social, emotional and behavioral health plan.

Within that plan, the DOE is to make recommendations regarding comprehensive mental health services, early intervention and treatment services for Indiana children from birth to age 22.

The law also mandates the DOE to recommend procedures by which the state will identify and assess children's social, emotional and behavioral health needs.

Other parts of SEA 529 haven't received as much attention, such as the section that removes limits on the amount of property taxes that can go to the Department of Child Services' functions, and mandates that counties "adopt ... a tax rate sufficient to raise the levy necessary" to pay for child services, including children's psychiatric residential treatment services. But, as counties work through their budgets, they're beginning to notice.



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For example, Tuesday the Associated Press reported that Tippecanoe County expects to collect \$6.5 million more from its taxpayers — mostly property owners — than it spent in 2005 for child services.


Other parts of the law address such things as criminal background checks and fingerprinting for persons working with children. It also takes the responsibility of collecting child support from the counties and gives it to the state through the Division of Child Services — something Rep. Dick Dodge (R-Pleasant Lake) said he didn't know was in there until a constituent called to complain that the state was sending her child support to the wrong person.

And, deadbeat parents beware: The law also outlines specific steps for finding you and any wages you may be earning.

Additionally, the law puts child care institutions, including daycares, under the umbrella of the Division of Child Services, along with foster family homes, group homes and child-placing agencies.

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| SP 500     | 1319.87    | 3.59 ▲ |
| Russ 2000  | 729.35     | 1.75 ▲ |
| AMEX       | 1939.28    | 3.05 ▲ |
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