HB 43 – Child Welfare by Representative Latvala (R-Clearwater)

Companion Bill: SB 122- Senator Rouson (D- St. Petersburg)

Target Population: Child protective investigators (CPI), attorneys for the Department of Children and Families (DCF), law enforcement officers, circuit and county court judges, Guardian ad Litems, individuals providing care to dependent children who are employed by community based care (CBC) agencies, people under investigation for child abuse and neglect, children in out-of-home care, and children under the age of 6 with head injuries/brain trauma in contact with the child welfare or law enforcement system.

Summary: In response to a state investigation into two-year-old Jordan Belliveau’s tragic death following a problem-plagued reunification with his mother, HB 43, also known as “Jordan’s Law” was passed. It requires the Florida Court Educational Council to establish standards for instruction of judges, child protection teams, GALs, welfare personnel, attorneys and law enforcement officers regarding head trauma and brain injury for children under 6 years old. Creates head trauma and brain injury training requirements for law enforcement
officers, dependent upon an appropriation. Establishes communication between law enforcement agencies & DCF related to certain individuals involved in the child welfare system. Authorizes lead agencies to provide intensive family reunification services that combine child welfare & mental health services. Authorizes the Department & certain lead agencies to create programs to more effectively provide case management services. Adds the ability for the third party credentialing agency to review findings and records involving death or critical incident if a complaint is filed by an outside party.

**Impact:** The state report after Jordan’s death confirmed that virtually every level of Pinellas County’s foster care system failed to protect this two-year old boy. Although Jordan’s Law does not address many of the systemic issues plaguing the child welfare system, it takes a first step towards preventing some of the same mistakes from being made in another child’s life.

The Belliveau report revealed a massive breakdown in communication between the child welfare system, judges, law enforcement officers, and guardian ad litem in the case. This bill would help ensure that communication between child welfare personnel and law enforcement officers have a clear path and requirement.

The Children’s Campaign applauds Representative Latvala for his passion to turn a tragic death and a case that highlighted many flaws in the struggling child welfare system into a step toward helping the system function better across stakeholders. The Children’s Campaign believes this overall reform effort would be more likely to occur if the Florida Governor and DCF Secretary would form a Blueprint Commission including the advocacy community to initiate a comprehensive review of the systemic issues rather than trying to fix problems after each individual tragedy.