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Missouri State Government Review Commission
Office of Administration, Division of Budget and Planning
124 Capitol Building, P.O. Box 809
Jefferson City, MO 65102

Government Review Commission,

We would like to comment on the preliminary proposal to move the First Steps program to the Department of Health and Senior Services (Preliminary Proposal #3 of Task Force C). Our organization represents the "Senate Bill 40" boards which receive property tax funds to provide services to individuals who have a developmental disability. Since the children in the First Steps program have developmental disabilities, we are concerned with its success.

We agree that First Steps should be moved from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. However, rather than moving it to the Department of Health and Senior Services, we suggest that it be moved to the Department of Mental Health, and we believe there is adequate justification for this recommendation.

Mental Health is already providing 40% of the service coordination for First Steps children. By having all service coordination provided by Mental Health and its community-based affiliates, there would be more consistency in service provision and less duplication of effort. Almost all First Steps children are eligible for Mental Health services. In fact, 70 to 80% of children are enrolled with Mental Health at the time they leave the First Steps program at age three. If Mental Health were responsible for First Steps there would be a continuity of services for all families from the time they enter the service system.

Government efficiency and the First Steps program will be improved by moving First Steps out of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. We believe and recommend that the program will be best improved and recipients and their families will be best served by moving it to the Department of Mental Health.

Sincerely,

Marcus Whitlock, President
Missouri Association of County Developmental Disabilities Services