

FULL ANALYSIS

I. SUBSTANTIVE ANALYSIS

A. HOUSE PRINCIPLES ANALYSIS:

Promote Personal Responsibility -- This bill redefines criminal child abuse.

Provide Limited Government -- This bill expands the number of persons and types of injuries for which compensation under the Crimes Compensation Trust Fund are paid.

B. EFFECT OF PROPOSED CHANGES:

Whether Speech Can Amount to Child Abuse

Florida's criminal child abuse statute, s. 827.03, F.S., provides that child abuse is an intentional physical or mental injury to a child, an intentional act that could be expected to result in a physical or mental injury to a child, or encouragement of any person to act that results or could be expected to result in physical or mental injury to a child. It further provides that it is a third-degree felony for a person to knowingly or willfully abuse a child without causing great bodily harm, disability, or disfigurement. Aggravated child abuse, which is a first degree felony, occurs when a person commits aggravated battery on a child, willfully tortures, punishes or cages a child, or knowingly and willfully abuses a child and causes great bodily harm, permanent disability or permanent disfigurement to the child.

In *State v. DuFresne*, the state alleged that a teacher who screamed at an autistic student caused the student "mental injury" and charged the teacher with criminal child abuse.¹ The defendant asserted that the statute is overbroad because it applies to speech that is protected by the First Amendment.² The 4th District Court of Appeal (DCA) held that in order for the criminal child abuse statute to withstand an overbreadth challenge, it could not apply to speech. The overbreadth doctrine relates to the First Amendment freedom of speech and "prohibits the Government from banning unprotected speech if a substantial amount of protected speech is prohibited or chilled in the process."³ A statute can be considered overbroad if it is written so broadly that it deters free expression.⁴

The 4th DCA reiterated this decision in 2006 in *Munao v. State*. In *Munao*, the court held that the defendant, who repeatedly told his six year-old child to get a knife and stab his mother, could not be charged with child abuse because, under *DuFresne*, the child abuse statute does not apply to speech.⁵

Shortly after the *Munao* decision was issued, the 1st DCA decided *State v. Coleman*. In *Coleman*, the state charged the defendant with child abuse and prosecuted him for causing mental injury when he drove by young girls and asked them vulgar and offensive questions.⁶ In disagreeing with the 4th DCA opinion, the 1st DCA stated:

We do not agree with *DuFresne* and *Munao*, however, that, to withstand an overbreadth challenge to section 827.03(1), we must construe the statute to avoid its application to *all* speech. If section 827.03(1), can be construed to be

¹ 782 So.2d 888, 889 (Fla. 4th DCA 2001).

² The First Amendment of the United States Constitution grants the freedoms of speech, religion, press, assembly, and petition. The First Amendment applies to the states through the Fourteenth Amendment, which prohibits states from depriving any person of life, liberty, or property without due process.

³ *State v. Coleman*, 937 So.2d 1226, 1229 (Fla. 1st DCA 2006)

⁴ Bryan A. Garner, *Black's Law Dictionary*, Second Pocket Edition 507 (West Publishing Co. 2001).

⁵ 939 So.2d 125, 128 (Fla. 4th DCA 2006).

⁶ 937 So.2d 1226, 1227 (Fla. 1st DCA 2006).

applicable *only* to specifically described unprotected speech, it can withstand an overbreadth challenge...⁷ If in applying section 827.03(1) to speech, courts define the proscribed speech by construing the statute *in pari materia* with the definitions in chapter 39, constitutional speech will not be implicated.⁸

This bill addresses the conflict by providing an exception to the criminal child abuse statute. Specifically, the bill provides that an act does not violate the child abuse statute if it is protected by the First Amendment of the United States Constitution or Article 1, Section 4 of the Florida Constitution.⁹ In relation to the cases discussed above, this language may be interpreted to mean that the child abuse statute does apply to speech so long as it is not constitutionally protected speech.

Mental Injury

In recent years, the criminal child abuse statute has been challenged as unconstitutionally vague because it does not define the term “mental injury.”¹⁰ In 2002, the Florida Supreme Court held that the statute was not unconstitutionally vague because “mental injury” was defined in ch. 39, F.S., a related child-protection statute.¹¹ Section 39.01, F.S., defines “mental injury” as “an injury to the intellectual or psychological capacity of a child as evidenced by a discernible and substantial impairment in the ability to function within the normal range of performance and behavior.” The Supreme Court opinion recommended that the criminal child abuse statute be amended to include a definition of mental injury.

This bill amends s. 827.03, F.S., to reference the definition of “mental injury” in s. 39.01(41), F.S.

Victim Assistance Program

Injured crime victims may be eligible for financial assistance through the Florida Attorney General's Division of Victim Services for medical care, lost income, funeral expenses and other out-of-pocket expenses directly related to the injury.¹² Payment is made from the Crime Compensation Trust Fund to compensate victims who have suffered *physical* injuries and certain victims who suffer *mental* injuries.¹³

Section 960.03(3), F.S., defines the term “crime”, which definition controls who is eligible for payment from the Division of Victim Services. Subsection (a) of that definition provides that “crime” means “a felony or misdemeanor offense committed by either an adult or a juvenile which results in physical injury or death. The term also includes any such criminal act which is committed within this state but which falls exclusively within federal jurisdiction.”

This bill redefines the term “crime” for the purposes of payment from the Crime Compensation Trust Fund to include an additional form of injury to a victim or intervenor.¹⁴ Specifically, the bill adds the term “mental injury,” as already defined by s. 39.01, F.S., to the definition of “crime.” As a result, a

⁷ *Id.* at 1230.

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ Which provides in part: “Every person may speak, write, and publish his sentiments on all subjects but shall be responsible for the abuse of that right.”

¹⁰ See *State v. DuFresne*, 782 So.2d 888 (Fla. 4th DCA 2001).

¹¹ See *DuFresne v. State*, 826 So.2d 272, 274 (Fla. 2002).

¹² *Id.*

¹³ Section 960.21, F.S.

¹⁴ The Crimes Compensation Trust Fund receives offender generated federal and state dollars to provide services to crime victims. The trust fund is funded primarily by court-ordered assessments from offenders, including a mandatory court cost, a surcharge on fines, and restitution. Florida's share of federal Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) dollars during 2005-2006 totaled \$27,437,000. VOCA funds awarded to Florida consisted of \$20,439,000 for victim assistance programs throughout the state and \$6,998,000 for financial compensation to victims for losses incurred as a result of their victimization. See the Division of Victim Services and Criminal Justice Programs Annual Report, 2005-2006 at <http://myfloridalegal.com/victims>.

felony or misdemeanor offense committed by an adult or juvenile that results in physical injury, mental injury, or death of the victim or intervenor is considered a crime for purposes of victim assistance.

Clarification of Criminal Child Abuse Statute

This bill changes the structure of s. 827.03, F.S., creating a definition section, followed by an “offenses” section that describes the conduct proscribed by the statute and the applicable penalties. The bill adds the definition of “mental injury” in s. 39.01, F.S. to s. 827.03, F.S. The bill also makes conforming changes to various sections of the Florida Statutes.

C. SECTION DIRECTORY:

Section 1 amends s. 827.03, F.S., relating to criminal penalties for child abuse and neglect.

Section 2 amends s. 775.084, F.S., relating to imprisonment for crime.

Section 3 amends s. 775.0877, F.S., relating to criminal transmission of HIV.

Section 4 amends s. 782.07, F.S., relating to manslaughter.

Section 5 amends s. 921.0022, F.S., relating to the Criminal Punishment Code and the offense severity ranking chart.

Section 6 amends s. 943.325, F.S., relating to blood or other biological specimen testing for DNA analysis.

Section 7 amends s. 948.062, F.S., relating to reviewing and reporting serious offenses committed by offenders placed on probation or community control.

Section 8 amends s. 960.03, F.S., relating to definitions applicable to portions of chapter 960, F.S.

Section 9 provides an effective date of July 1, 2008.

II. FISCAL ANALYSIS & ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT

A. FISCAL IMPACT ON STATE GOVERNMENT:

1. Revenues:

None.

2. Expenditures:

The portion of this bill amending the definition of crime applicable to the crime compensation fund appears to have an unknown minimal negative fiscal impact on the Crime Compensation Trust Fund because the bill expands the definition of crime to include *all* offenses that result only in psychiatric or psychological injury. *See Fiscal Comments.*

B. FISCAL IMPACT ON LOCAL GOVERNMENTS:

1. Revenues:

None.

2. Expenditures:

None.

C. DIRECT ECONOMIC IMPACT ON PRIVATE SECTOR:

None.

D. FISCAL COMMENTS:

The bill adds the term “mental injury” to the definition of “crime” and defines “mental injury” in accordance with s. 39.01, F.S. Children are currently eligible to receive compensation awards if they are under 16, present at the scene of a crime, saw or heard the crime, and suffered a psychiatric or psychological injury because of the crime as long as they were not physically injured. Children under 16 are also eligible to receive compensation if they suffer a psychiatric or psychological injury as a direct result of a forcible felony being committed upon them.

To the extent that this bill increases the number children eligible to receive a compensation award for mental injury, there could be a fiscal impact. However, many of the children eligible under the “mental injury” criterion contained in this bill may be eligible under existing law.

III. COMMENTS

A. CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUES:

1. Applicability of Municipality/County Mandates Provision:

This bill appears to be exempt from the requirements of Article VII, Section 18 of the Florida Constitution because it is a criminal law.

2. Other:

None.

B. RULE-MAKING AUTHORITY:

None.

C. DRAFTING ISSUES OR OTHER COMMENTS:

The guilt of a person charged with a crime must be established beyond a reasonable doubt for every element of the offense charged.¹⁵ If there are multiple elements of an offense, then a prosecutor will have to establish that each element is present beyond a reasonable doubt. It is possible that this bill could be interpreted to require a prosecutor in a child abuse case prove that an act does *not* violate the First Amendment beyond a reasonable doubt. This bill could possibly make it more difficult for the state to prosecute child abuse offenses.

This bill provides that an act does not violate the section if it is protected by the First Amendment to the United States Constitution or s. 4, Art I of the State Constitution. It appears that the bill anticipates an effect on the freedom of *speech*. However, the bill could possibly be interpreted as giving more protections to the other freedoms addressed in the First Amendment, namely religion, press, assembly, and petition.

¹⁵ *State v. Sebastian*, 171 So. 2d 893 (Fla. 1965).

D. STATEMENT OF THE SPONSOR

No statement submitted.

IV. AMENDMENTS/COUNCIL SUBSTITUTE CHANGES

None.