

The Florida Senate
BILL ANALYSIS AND FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT

(This document is based on the provisions contained in the legislation as of the latest date listed below.)

Prepared By: The Professional Staff of the Committee on Health Policy

BILL: SB 544

INTRODUCER: Senators Hutson and Berman

SUBJECT: Swimming Lesson Voucher Program

DATE: January 12, 2024

REVISED: _____

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	<u>Looke</u>	<u>Brown</u>	<u>HP</u>	<u>Pre-meeting</u>
2.	_____	_____	<u>AHS</u>	_____
3.	_____	_____	<u>FP</u>	_____

I. Summary:

SB 544 creates s. 514.073, F.S., to establish the Swimming Lesson Voucher Program (program) within the Department of Health (DOH) to increase water safety by offering vouchers for swimming lessons to families with an income of up to 200 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL) that have one or more children under four years of age or younger. The bill requires the DOH to establish eligibility criteria for the vouchers, contract with a network of swimming lesson vendors to ensure availability, and to establish methods for members of the public to apply for vouchers.

The bill provides an effective date of July 1, 2024.

II. Present Situation:

The Danger of Drowning

Drowning is one of the leading causes of accidental death among children. For all ages, the current annual global estimate is 295,000 drowning deaths, although this figure is thought to underreport fatal drowning, in particular boating and disaster related drowning mortality.

Drowning disproportionately impacts children and young people, with over half of all drowning deaths occurring among people younger than 25 years old. In many countries, children under five years of age record the highest rate of fatal and non-fatal drowning, with incidents commonly occurring in swimming pools and bathtubs in high income countries and in bodies of water in and around a home in low income contexts.¹

¹ Peden AE, Franklin RC. Learning to Swim: An Exploration of Negative Prior Aquatic Experiences among Children. Int J Environ Res Public Health. 2020 May 19;17(10):3557. doi: 10.3390/ijerph17103557. PMID: 32438661; PMCID: PMC7277817. Available at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7277817/>. (Last visited Jan. 11, 2024).

Drowning Deaths in Florida

Drowning deaths in Florida have consistently ranged between 350 and 500 deaths per year in the state from 2003 to present. Data from 2022 show that most counties suffered less than 10 deaths from drowning in that year, but many highly populated and coastal counties suffered from a much higher rate of drowning.² For example, Broward County had 46 drowning deaths in 2022, Miami-Dade had 30, Hillsborough had 33, and Palm Beach had 42.³

Formal Swimming Lessons and Drowning Prevention

Learning to swim has been found to be an effective drowning prevention strategy and has been proposed by the World Health Organization as one of ten key strategies for global drowning prevention. Participation in formal swimming lessons has been shown to reduce drowning risk among children aged 1–19 years, and a recent review of evidence suggests that teaching aquatic competencies to young children causes no increased risk, particularly when combined with the additional drowning prevention strategies of supervision, restricting access to water and caregiver training in cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR).⁴ Swimming lessons have been found to be particularly effective in protecting children age 0-4 from drowning with one study showing that formal swimming lessons were associated with an 88 percent reduction in the risk for drowning for that population.⁵

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

SB 544 creates the Swimming Lesson Voucher Program within the DOH. The purpose of the program is to increase water safety in Florida by offering vouchers for swimming lessons at no cost to families at or below 200 percent of the FPL and who have at least one child aged four or younger. The bill requires the DOH to:

- Contract with and establish a network of swimming lesson vendors that will accept the vouchers offered by the program. The bill specifies that the DOH must attempt to contract with at least one swimming lesson vendor in each county. Additionally, the bill requires that any vendor that offers swimming lessons at a public pool that is owned or maintained by a county or municipality must participate in the program.
- Establish a method for members of the public to apply for vouchers and for determining the applicant's eligibility. The bill requires the DOH to establish eligibility criteria including, but not limited to:
 - The age of each child for whom a voucher is being sought, which can be no more than four years of age;
 - The family's income level up to 200 percent of the FPL; and
 - The family's address of residency in Florida.
- Subject to a specific appropriation, issue vouchers to eligible applicants

² Florida Health Charts, Deaths from Unintentional Drowning, available at <https://www.flhealthcharts.gov/ChartsDashboards/rdPage.aspx?rdReport=Death.DataViewer&cid=0105>, (last visited Jan 10, 2024).

³ *Id.*

⁴ *Supra*, note. 2

⁵ Brenner RA, Taneja GS, Haynie DL, Trumble AC, Qian C, Klinger RM, Klebanoff MA. Association between swimming lessons and drowning in childhood: a case-control study. *Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med.* 2009 Mar;163(3):203-10. doi: 10.1001/archpediatrics.2008.563. PMID: 19255386; PMCID: PMC4151293.

The bill also authorizes the DOH to seek grants or other public or private funding for the program and requires the DOH to adopt rules to implement the program.

The bill's provisions take effect July 1, 2024.

IV. Constitutional Issues:

A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:

None.

B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:

None.

C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

None.

D. State Tax or Fee Increases:

None.

E. Other Constitutional Issues:

None.

V. Fiscal Impact Statement:

A. Tax/Fee Issues:

None.

B. Private Sector Impact:

SB 544 may have a positive fiscal impact on families seeking swimming lessons for children who qualify for vouchers under the program.

C. Government Sector Impact:

The bill may have a negative fiscal impact on the DOH as it implements the program. As of this writing, the department has not provided an estimate of such impact, if there is one.

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

None.

VII. Related Issues:

None.

VIII. Statutes Affected:

This bill creates section 514.073 of the Florida Statutes.

IX. Additional Information:

A. Committee Substitute – Statement of Changes:

(Summarizing differences between the Committee Substitute and the prior version of the bill.)

None.

B. Amendments:

None.