

By Senator Avila

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1 A bill to be entitled
2 An act relating to the Spectrum Alert; creating s.
3 937.0401, F.S.; providing legislative findings;
4 requiring the Department of Law Enforcement, in
5 cooperation with the Department of Transportation, the
6 Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles, the
7 Department of the Lottery, and local law enforcement
8 agencies, to establish and implement the Spectrum
9 Alert; requiring the department, in cooperation with
10 specified entities, to develop a training program and
11 alert system for missing children with autism spectrum
12 disorder which is compatible with existing alert
13 systems; specifying requirements for the training
14 program; requiring the Department of Law Enforcement
15 to establish specified policies and procedures;
16 authorizing the department to adopt rules; providing
17 an effective date.

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19 Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:

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21 Section 1. Section 937.0401, Florida Statutes, is created
22 to read:

23 937.0401 Spectrum Alert.-

24 (1) The Legislature finds that autism spectrum disorder
25 (ASD) significantly affects children in this country, creating
26 unique challenges that can lead to critical safety risks,
27 notably elopement or wandering behaviors in children. Children
28 with ASD are prone to wander from safe environments, at a higher
29 rate than their non-autistic peers. Elopement frequently results

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30 in severe consequences, including fatal traffic accidents and
31 drownings. Notably, drowning is the leading cause of death of
32 children with ASD in this country, with Florida ranking fifth in
33 the nation. The high propensity for elopement and the
34 ineffectiveness of traditional search and response methods
35 necessitates a robust system that will swiftly locate and ensure
36 the safety of missing children with ASD. The Legislature finds
37 that a standardized system is necessary to aid in the search for
38 a missing child with ASD.

39 (2) The Department of Law Enforcement, in cooperation with
40 the Department of Transportation, the Department of Highway
41 Safety and Motor Vehicles, the Department of the Lottery, and
42 local law enforcement agencies, shall establish and implement
43 the Spectrum Alert to enhance the safety and well-being of
44 children with ASD through immediate and effective community and
45 emergency response.

46 (3) The Department of Law Enforcement, in cooperation with
47 the Department of Transportation, the Department of Highway
48 Safety and Motor Vehicles, the Department of the Lottery, and
49 local law enforcement agencies, shall:

50 (a) Develop a training program and alert system for missing
51 children with ASD which is compatible with existing alert
52 systems. The training program must implement crisis intervention
53 team training to equip law enforcement officers with the skills
54 to understand ASD and other mental illnesses, to de-escalate
55 interactions with children in crisis, to facilitate appropriate
56 interventions, and to respond effectively to a reported missing
57 child emergency when the child has ASD.

58 (b) Establish policies and procedures for responding to a

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59 reported missing child emergency when the child has ASD. The
60 policies and procedures must, at a minimum, provide for all of
61 the following:

62 1. Immediate and widespread dissemination of critical
63 information when a child with ASD is reported missing.

64 2. Enhancement of emergency response teams' competence by
65 informing them of the unique behaviors and needs of children
66 with ASD.

67 3. Measures to increase public awareness and understanding
68 of the risks associated with autism-related elopement, to foster
69 community support for children with ASD.

70 (c) Require a law enforcement agency, at a minimum, to do
71 all of the following when receiving such a report:

72 1. Contact media outlets in the affected area or
73 surrounding jurisdictions.

74 2. Inform all on-duty law enforcement officers of the
75 reported missing child with ASD.

76 3. Communicate the report to all other law enforcement
77 agencies in the counties surrounding the county in which the
78 report was filed.

79 (4) The Department of Law Enforcement may adopt rules to
80 implement and administer this section.

81 Section 2. This act shall take effect July 1, 2025.