

By the Appropriations Committee on Criminal and Civil Justice;
and Senator Avila

604-03474-25

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

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

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

937.0401 Spectrum Alert.—

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

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

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

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

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

(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. For the 2025-2026 fiscal year, the sum of
82 \$190,000 in nonrecurring funds is appropriated from the
83 Operating Trust Fund within the Department of Law Enforcement to
84 the Department of Law Enforcement for the purpose of
85 implementing the Spectrum Alert.

86 Section 3. This act shall take effect July 1, 2025.