

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 Appropriations Committee on Criminal and Civil Justice

BILL: SB 418

INTRODUCER: Senator Jones

SUBJECT: Law Enforcement Officer Interactions with Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder

DATE: February 3, 2026

REVISED: _____

| | ANALYST | STAFF DIRECTOR | REFERENCE | ACTION |
|----|----------------|-----------------|------------|------------------|
| 1. | <u>Vaughan</u> | <u>Stokes</u> | <u>CJ</u> | Favorable |
| 2. | <u>Kolich</u> | <u>Harkness</u> | <u>ACJ</u> | Favorable |
| 3. | _____ | _____ | <u>FP</u> | _____ |

I. Summary:

SB 418 creates s. 320.021, F.S., to create the “Blue Envelope Program” within the Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles (HSMV) to improve communication between individuals with autism spectrum disorder and law enforcement officers during motor vehicle-related interactions by January 1, 2027.

The blue envelope will identify the individual as having Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), the envelopes will include communication guidelines for officers and will be available by request from the HSMV or local tax collector beginning January 1, 2027.

The bill amends s. 943.1727, F.S., to create joint training with the Criminal Justice Standards and Training Commission (CJSTC) and an organization that advocates on behalf of, and offers training to law enforcement officers on interactions with, individuals with ASD. The training must include all of the following:

- Recognizing ASD symptoms.
- Interview/interrogation techniques.
- Locating missing individuals with ASD.
- Techniques for recognizing the agency of an individual with ASD while identifying potential abusive or coercive situations.
- De-escalation strategies.
- Differentiating ASD behaviors from belligerence and understanding the law as it related to the use of the Baker Act on an individual with ASD.
- Impact of officer interactions on ASD individuals.
- Information about the blue envelope program and “SAFE” designation.

The bill requires that initial certification includes in-person instruction and online or in-person for continued employment training or education.

The bill requires that each basic skills course required for law enforcement officers to obtain initial certification includes the required training by July 1, 2028. By July 1, 2029, each law enforcement officer must successfully complete such training as part of continued training or education.

The bill has an insignificant negative fiscal impact to the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE) related to programmatic changes needed to implement the bill. See Section V., Fiscal Impact Statement.

The bill takes effect on July 1, 2026.

II. Present Situation:

Criminal Justice Standards and Training Commission (CJSTC)

The CJSTC is established under s. 943.11, F.S within the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE). The commission is an independent policy making body that ensures that Florida's criminal justice officers are ethical, qualified, and well-trained. The CJSTC is responsible for creating entry-level curricula and certification testing for criminal justice officers in Florida, establishing minimum standards for employment and certification, and revoking the certification of officers who fail to maintain these minimum standards of conduct.¹

Minimum Qualifications

An individual must be at least 19 years of age to become a certified law enforcement officer or a certified correctional probation officer and must be at least 18 years of age to become a certified correctional officer. Additionally, the individual must be a citizen of the United States, not have been convicted of a felony after a specified date or received a dishonorable discharge from the military, pass a physical exam, and have good moral character as determined by a background investigation. Certification as a law enforcement officer or correctional officer requires a high school diploma or equivalent (GED). Certification as a correctional probation officer requires a bachelor's degree.^{2,3}

Autism Training

In 2017, s. 943.1727, F.S., was amended to establish autism training for law enforcement officers. This training may be counted toward the 40 hours of instruction for continued employment or appointment as a law enforcement officer under s. 943.135, F.S.⁴

¹ Florida Department of Law Enforcement, Criminal Justice Professionalism Division, *Overview of the Professionalism Division*, <https://www.fdle.state.fl.us/CJSTC/Overview.aspx> (last visited January 27, 2026).

² Florida Department of Law Enforcement, *Department of Law Enforcement Criminal Justice Professionalism Services*, <https://www.fdle.state.fl.us/cjstc/officer-requirements/how-to-become-an-officer> (last visited January 27, 2026).

³ Section 943.13, F.S.

⁴ The commission shall, by rule, adopt a program that requires all officers, as a condition of continued employment or appointment as officers, to receive periodic commission-approved continuing training or education. Such continuing training or education shall be required at the rate of 40 hours every 4 years. No officer shall be denied a reasonable opportunity by the employing agency to comply with this section. The employing agency must document that the continuing training or education is job-related and consistent with the needs of the employing agency. The employing agency must maintain and

Section 627.6686(2)(b), F.S., defines “autism spectrum disorder” to mean any of the following disorders as defined in the most recent edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders of the American Psychiatric Association:

- Autistic disorder.
- Asperger’s syndrome.
- Pervasive developmental disorder not otherwise specified.⁵

The Florida Law Enforcement Academy Basic Recruit Training Program requires a total of 770 hours of instruction time, including a lesson on topics relating to the autism spectrum disorder. Training includes information on interviewing people with autism spectrum disorder and responding to missing persons incidents involving people with autism spectrum disorder.

There is a 4-hour CJSTC specialized course, Autism Spectrum Disorder and Awareness, which is currently under revision but will be up for approval by the CJSTC in May of 2026. Additionally, the FDLE offers two online courses related to autism which can be taken as part of an officer’s mandatory retraining. These are Autism Awareness Telecommunicator and Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) and Interviews. While these two courses can be counted toward mandatory retraining, they were not developed by the CJSTC.⁶

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

The bill creates s. 320.021, F.S., to create the “Blue Envelope Program” within the Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles (HSMV) to improve communication between individuals with autism spectrum disorder and law enforcement officers during motor vehicle-related interactions by January 1, 2027.

The blue envelope will identify the individual as having Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and will include communication guidelines for officers during interactions with these individuals. The blue envelopes will be available by request from the HSMV or local tax collector beginning January 1, 2027.

The bill amends s. 943.1727, F.S., to create joint training with the CJSTC and an organization that advocates on behalf of, and offers training to, law enforcement officers in this state on interactions with individuals with ASD. The training must include:

- Recognizing ASD symptoms,
- Interview/interrogation techniques,
- Locating missing individuals with ASD,
- Techniques for recognizing the agency of an individual with ASD while identifying potential abusive or coercive situations,
- De-escalation strategies,

submit, or electronically transmit, the documentation to the commission, in a format approved by the commission.

Section 943.135, F.S.

⁵ Section 627.6686, F.S.

⁶ Florida Department of Law Enforcement, 2026 Agency Legislative Bill Analysis, *SB 418-Law Enforcement Officer Interactions with Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder*, December 6, 2025 (on file with the Senate Committee on Criminal Justice).

- Differentiating ASD behaviors from belligerence and understanding the law as it related to the use of the Baker Act on an individual with ASD,
- Impact of officer interactions on ASD individuals and
- Information about the Blue Envelope Program and “SAFE” designation.

The bill requires that initial certification includes in-person instruction and online or in-person for continued employment training or education.

The bill requires that each basic skills course required for law enforcement officers to obtain initial certification includes the required training by July 1, 2028. By July 1, 2029, each law enforcement officer must successfully complete such training as part of continued training or education.

The bill takes effect on July 1, 2026.

IV. Constitutional Issues:

A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:

The bill does not appear to require cities and counties to expend funds or limit their authority to raise revenue or receive state-shared revenues as specified by Art. VII, s. 18 of the State Constitution.

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:

None.

C. Government Sector Impact:

The FDLE estimated in their agency bill analysis that the cost to make changes in the Automated Training Management System (ATMS) would be \$64,000 and would take approximately four months and the cost to update the curriculum is indeterminate but insignificant. The costs of both requirements can be absorbed within existing resources.⁷ The HSMV will be able to absorb the cost of creating the Blue Envelope Program within existing resources.

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

The FDLE recommends that the effective date be amended to January 1, 2027, to allow time to complete necessary programmatic changes to the ATMS system.

VII. Related Issues:

None.

VIII. Statutes Affected:

This bill substantially amends section 943.1727 of the Florida Statutes.

This bill creates section 320.021 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.

This Senate Bill Analysis does not reflect the intent or official position of the bill's introducer or the Florida Senate.

⁷ *Id.*