

FLORIDA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

BILL ANALYSIS

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BILL #: [HB 491](#)

TITLE: Faith-based Content in Batterers' Intervention Programs

SPONSOR(S): Blanco

COMPANION BILL: [SB 624](#) (Yarborough)

LINKED BILLS: None

RELATED BILLS: [SB 624](#) (Yarborough)

Committee References

[Human Services](#)

17 Y, 0 N

[Judiciary](#)

[Health & Human Services](#)

SUMMARY

Effect of the Bill:

HB 491 authorizes Batterers' Intervention Programs (BIPs) to offer supplemental faith-based activities as a voluntary elective offering to participants referred to a BIP by court-order or by consent.

Fiscal or Economic Impact:

None

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ANALYSIS

EFFECT OF THE BILL:

Domestic Violence

Judicial Relief

Batterers' Intervention Programs

The [Office of Domestic Violence \(ODV\)](#) within the Department of Children and Families (DCF) certifies [Batterers' Intervention Programs \(BIPs\)](#), which are court-ordered punitive and rehabilitative programs created by statute to hold defendants accountable for acts of [domestic violence](#). BIP [curricula](#) must comply with statutory and DCF rule requirements. ODV annually monitors BIP curricula for compliance.

The bill authorizes a BIP to offer supplemental [faith-based activities](#) as a voluntary elective offering to participants referred to a BIP by court-order or by consent, codifying existing practice. The bill, however, preserves the current law that requires all BIP curricula must be based on a psychoeducational or cognitive behavioral therapy intervention model. (Section [1](#)).

The bill provides for an effective date of July 1, 2026. (Section [2](#)).

RULEMAKING:

The bill modifies a provision of law that is already under the DCF's existing rulemaking authority in [s. 741.327\(2\), F.S.](#), thus allowing DCF to repeal, amend, or adopt rules, as necessary, to implement the bill.

Lawmaking is a legislative power; however, the Legislature may delegate a portion of such power to executive branch agencies to create rules that have the force of law. To exercise this delegated power, an agency must have a grant of rulemaking authority and a law to implement.

STORAGE NAME: h0491a.HSS

DATE: 1/14/2026

RELEVANT INFORMATION

SUBJECT OVERVIEW:

Domestic Violence

Domestic Violence

Under current law, domestic violence is any assault, aggravated assault, battery, aggravated battery, sexual assault, sexual battery, stalking, aggravated stalking, kidnapping, false imprisonment, or any criminal offense by one family or household member against another family or household member that results in physical injury or death.¹ The Department of Children and Families (DCF) emphasizes that domestic violence is a pattern of behaviors, violence, or threats of violence, that one person uses to establish power and control over a current or former intimate partner.²

The Bureau of Justice Statistics within the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) publishes an annual criminal victimization report that includes statistics on nonfatal violent crimes and property crimes.³ For the 2024 reporting period⁴, DOJ estimates there were 1,110,040 domestic violence victimizations⁵ in the U.S. – a rate of 3.9 per 1,000 persons aged 12 or older.⁶ Of these domestic violence victimizations, only 64.5% were reported to law enforcement.⁷ For Florida specific-data, the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE) collects incident-based crime reports in coordination with local law enforcement on the Florida Incident-Based Reporting System (FIBRS). However, FIBRS does not disaggregate violent crimes by domestic violence crimes.⁸

¹ S. 731.28, F.S.; “Family or household member,” means spouses, former spouses, persons related by blood or marriage, persons who are presently residing together as if a family or who have resided together in the past as if a family, and persons who are parents of a child in common regardless of whether they have been married. With the exception of persons who have a child in common, the family or household members must be currently residing or have in the past resided together in the same single dwelling unit.

² Office of Domestic Violence, “Domestic Violence Annual Report 2025,” Department of Children and Families, p. 2, (Jan. 2026) <https://state-reports.floridacollections.org/office-domestic-violence-annual-report> (last visited Dec. 29, 2025). Print copy on file with the Human Services Subcommittee.

³ Bureau of Justice Statistics, “Criminal Victimization, 2024, U.S. Department of Justice,” (Sept. 2025) <https://bjs.ojp.gov/library/publications/criminal-victimization-2024> (last visited Dec. 29, 2025). The Bureau of Justice Statistics National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) is an annual data collection carried out by the U.S. Census Bureau. The NCVS is a self-report survey administered annually, from January 1 to December 31 in 2024, which covered crimes experienced from July 1, 2023 to November 30, 2024.

⁴ *Id.* Since annual NCVS estimates are based on the number and characteristics of crimes that respondents experienced during the prior 6 months, crimes are classified by the year of the survey and not by the year of the crime.

⁵ Bureau of Justice Statistics, “Domestic Violence in the U.S.: Key Findings from the 2024 National Crime Victimization Survey,” U.S. Department of Justice, (Sept. 2025) https://bjs.ojp.gov/document/domesticviolence_2024.pdf (last visited Dec. 29, 2025). The Bureau of Justice defines domestic violence as violence committed by an intimate partner (current or former spouse, boyfriend, or girlfriend) or another family member.

⁶ *Supra*, FN 3 at 3. In the 2023 reporting cycle, there were 1,65,890 domestic violence victimizations in the United States, at a rate of 4.1 per 1,000 persons aged 12 or older.

⁷ *Supra*, FN 3 at 7. The reporting rate in 2023 was 47.7%. The Bureau of Justice reports that victims may not report a crime for a variety of reasons, including out of a fear of reprisal or getting the offender in trouble, out of a belief that police would not or could not do anything to help, and out of a belief that the crime is a personal issue or too trivial to report.

⁸ Florida Department of Law Enforcement, “Florida Incident-Based Reporting System,” <https://www.fdle.state.fl.us/CJAB/FIBRS> (last visited Dec. 29, 2025). The Federal Bureau of Investigation stopped collecting summary-based crime data following the 2020 collection cycle. In response, Florida began its transition away from reporting annual summary-based crime data towards reporting annual incident-based crime data. This explains why 2020 data is the most recent comprehensive data available under the Uniform Crime Reports page. *See* Florida Department of Law Enforcement, “Annual State Summary Crime Data Reports,” <https://www.fdle.state.fl.us/CJAB/UCR/Annual-Reports> (last visited Dec. 29, 2025).

Judicial Relief

Court Orders for Batterers' Intervention Programs

Civil Court

Individuals can directly petition the court for an injunction against the perpetrator of domestic violence. The petitioning individual may either be a victim or another family or household member with reasonable cause to believe that he or she is in imminent danger of becoming a victim of domestic violence.⁹ A petitioner seeking an injunction may seek one or more of the following:¹⁰

- A restraining order.
- An order for temporary exclusive use and possession of shared dwelling or residence of the petitioner.
- An order for a temporary parenting plan if the petitioner and respondent share a minor child or children.
- An order for a neutral, safe exchange location for exchange of a minor child or children.
- An order of temporary child support for a shared minor child or children.
- An order directing the perpetrator of domestic violence to participate in a batterers' intervention program.
- An order with terms that the presiding judge finds necessary, which may include directives to law enforcement.

After a hearing and final judgment, the presiding judge may issue an injunction ordering that the perpetrator of domestic violence participate in a batterers' intervention program (BIP). However, unless the presiding judge finds BIPs would be inappropriate, the presiding judge must order BIP attendance if the perpetrator of domestic violence willfully violated an ex parte injunction,¹¹ has a conviction of a crime involving violence or the threat of violence, had adjudication withheld relating to a crime involving violence or the threat of violence, pled no contest to a crime involving violence or a threat of violence, or had a prior injunction for protection against him or her after proper notice and hearing.¹² Additionally, a final judgment on an injunction for protection against domestic violence must, on its face, indicate that it is a violation of [s. 790.233, F.S.](#), and a first-degree misdemeanor, for the respondent to have in his or her care, custody, possession, or control any firearm or ammunition.¹³

Criminal Court

The court may enforce a violation of an injunction for protection against domestic violence through a civil or criminal contempt proceeding, or the state attorney may prosecute it as a crime.¹⁴ If the state attorney successfully prosecutes a crime of domestic violence, by securing a conviction or a plea deal, the court must order the perpetrator of domestic violence to a minimum term of 1 years' probation, which typically includes the completion of a BIP as a condition of probation.¹⁵

Batterers' Intervention Programs

[Batterers' intervention programs \(BIPs\)](#) are specialized, court-ordered interventions tailored to the perpetrators of domestic violence, which aim to hold perpetrators accountable for their abusive behavior under the full weight of the criminal justice system, to address the root cause of domestic violence, and to deter participants from

⁹ S. [741.30\(1\), F.S.](#)

¹⁰ S. [741.30\(3\)\(k\), F.S.](#)

¹¹ In this context, the ex parte injunction allows the court to award a temporary 15-day protective order to someone who appears to be in immediate and present danger of domestic violence without the perpetrator of domestic violence provided notice or a full hearing. See [s. 741.30\(5\), F.S.](#)

¹² S. [741.30\(6\)\(e\), F.S.](#)

¹³ S. [741.30\(6\)\(g\), F.S.](#)

¹⁴ S. [741.30\(9\), F.S.](#)

¹⁵ S. [741.281, F.S.](#) Current law allows the judge discretion to withhold the BIP condition if he or she states on the record why the batterer's participation in a BIP is inappropriate or why the batterer does not qualify for BIP participation.

committing acts of domestic violence again in the future.¹⁶ This whole-of-system approach involves judges, prosecutors, defense counsel, victim advocates, probation officers, agency administrators, and BIP service providers. To help participants take responsibility for their behavior and to reform, BIPs address, among other variables, a perpetrator’s underlying psychology, propensity to future violence, and substance abuse history.¹⁷

Current law requires DCF to adopt rules to certify and monitor BIPs, to ensure statewide consistency; this rulemaking authority includes, but is not limited to, the development of the criteria and procedures to approve, suspend, or reject certification.¹⁸

Certification

The DCF [Office of Domestic Violence \(ODV\)](#), which operates as the central clearinghouse and administrator of state and federal funding initiatives for domestic violence prevention and intervention programs,¹⁹ receives BIP service provider applications.²⁰ Current law requires BIP curriculum to be based on either a cognitive behavioral therapy model or a psychoeducational model that address tactics of power and control exercised by one person over another. BIPs must be at least 29 weeks in length and include 24 weekly sessions. BIPs must administer appropriate intake, assessment, and orientation programming. Current law requires user fees to fund BIPs, to emphasize individual responsibility for domestic violence; however, current law excuses the user-fee requirement if a local, state, or federal funding initiative funds BIPs, in whole or in part.²¹

DCF ODV reviews the proposed BIP’s policy and procedure manual, the curriculum, and the screening and assessment tools to ensure the BIP meets minimum standards. ODV may collaborate with the applicant to remedy a proposed BIP’s shortcomings during the approval process.²² BIPs must establish protocols to effectively communicate to community stakeholders (i.e., victims and their families, the local justice system, and social service agencies) any potential danger a BIP participant poses to the victim and, or, children. The BIP provider must keep the courts, prosecutors, probation and parole officers, the victim, and other community stakeholders, as appropriate, informed of the participant’s progress through the BIP as well as instances of noncompliance or emerging risks of repeat violence or homicide.²³

DCF ODV monitors programs for compliance, assessing programs sites within 6 months of certification. Certification is valid for one year.²⁴

DCF ODV provides the Office of the State Courts Administrator the list of DCF ODV-certified BIPs for distribution to the criminal justice system so that judges can refer a batterer to a BIP.²⁵ As of January 13, 2026, ODV certifies 80 BIPs.²⁶

[Program Curriculum](#)

DCF ODV regulations delineate the required and prohibited curriculum components of a BIP, which the table below depicts.²⁷

¹⁶ Department of Children and Families, Agency Bill Analysis for HB 491 (2026), pp. 2 (Jan. 13, 2026).
¹⁷ See Kerry Healey, Christine Smith, and Chris O’Sullivan, Batterer Intervention: Program Approaches and Criminal Justice Strategies, United States Department of Justice, (Feb. 1998) <https://www.ojp.gov/library/publications/batterer-intervention-program-approaches-and-criminal-justice-strategies> pp. Foreword, xii (last visited Dec. 29, 2025).
¹⁸ S. [741.32, F.S.](#), [s. 741.327, F.S.](#)
¹⁹ *Supra*, FN 2.
²⁰ Rule 65H-2.014(18), F.A.C., Rule 65H-2.015(2), F.A.C.
²¹ S. [741.325\(1\), F.S.](#)
²² *Supra*, FN 16.
²³ Rule 65H-2.016(1), F.A.C.
²⁴ *Supra*, FN 16.
²⁵ Rule 65H-2.016(5), F.A.C.
²⁶ *Supra*, FN 16.
²⁷ Rule 65H-2.017(1)-(2), F.A.C.

BIP Program Curriculum	
Required Components	Prohibited Components
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Assign responsibility for domestic violence solely to the batterer. - Assist batterer in accepting responsibility. - Develop batterer’s critical thinking skills that allow the batterer to rethink their behavior and identify behavior choices other than violence (i.e., identify and articulate feelings; listening with empathy; overcoming distorted thinking on emotions and behavior), and negotiation and conflict resolution skills. - Address intimate partner violence as a learned behavior, not an impulse control issue. - Recognizes that domestic violence is not provoked, or the result of, substance abuse. - Recognizes substance abuse patterns in domestic violence. - Address gender specific forms of violence. - Challenge stereotypical gender role expectations. - Help batterers develop and improve support systems. - Address the effects of domestic violence on children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Couples, marriage, or family therapy or any manner of victim participation. - Anger management techniques that identify anger as the cause of domestic violence. - Theories or techniques that identify poor impulse control as the primary cause of domestic violence or that identify psychopathology on part of either party as a primary cause of domestic violence. - Fair-fighting techniques. - Faith-based ideology associated with a particular religion or denomination.

ODV annually monitors curriculum components for compliance with rule and statute.²⁸

[Faith-Based Components](#)

DCF ODV rule currently prohibits faith-based components associated with a particular religion or denomination as a required component of programming for BIP certification.²⁹ However, DCF advises that this regulation does not preclude BIP programs from offering faith-based activities to participants as supplemental electives; the prohibition only applies to faith-based components as required components of a mandatory, court-ordered BIP curriculum. ODV certifies BIPs with faith-based elements operated by the Salvation Army, Healing Hearts Ministry, Community Hands of Hope, and Free Spirit Evangelistic Outreach Ministries, to name a few.³⁰

The First Amendment of the United States Constitution contains what is known as the Establishment and Free Exercise Clauses. Together those clauses read:

“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof...”³¹

The United States Supreme Court has interpreted this to mean that federal and state governments cannot create laws that establish a belief in a particular religion or prohibit citizens from freely exercising their religious beliefs.³²

DCF recently defended a First Amendment challenge in federal court related to the current provision of Rule 65H-2.017, F.A.C., that prohibits BIP curriculum from including faith-based ideology associated with a particular religion or denomination.³³ In September 2025, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit upheld the DCF rule because “the curriculum and presentation of court-ordered BIPs are government speech,” not private speech,

²⁸ Rule 65H-2.017(3), F.A.C.

²⁹ Rule 65H-2.017(2), F.A.C.

³⁰ *Supra*, FN 16.

³¹ U.S. CONST. amend. I.

³² *Cantwell v. Connecticut*, 310 U.S. 296, 303-304 (1940).

³³ *Nussbaumer v. Secretary, Florida Dep’t of Children and Families*, 150 F.4th 1371 (11th Cir. 2025).

which means that DCF's denial of a psychologist's BIP application for noncompliant programming cannot, as a matter of law, support a claim for government interference with the psychologist's free exercise rights.³⁴ The court observed that "Florida's court-ordered BIPs have traditionally communicated the government's message" because Florida "chooses to require attendance at courses with specific content that it believes should be communicated to counter domestic violence" and because "a court-ordered [BIP] participant would identify BIP curricula with the government, even if they also identify it with a specific BIP provider."³⁵ The court also observed that "minimum standards for BIP content have always existed," even if DCF's oversight has not been uniform.³⁶

RECENT LEGISLATION:

YEAR	BILL #/SUBJECT	HOUSE/SENATE SPONSOR(S)	OTHER INFORMATION
2025	CS/HB 391 - Faith-based Content in Batterer's Intervention Program	Blanco/ <i>Rodriguez</i>	The bill passed the House, but died in the Senate.
2021	HB 1231 - Domestic Violence	Melo/ <i>Bean</i>	Became law on July 1, 2021.

OTHER RESOURCES:

[Cantwell v. Connecticut, 310 U.S. 296 \(1940\).](#)

[Lee v. Weisman, 505 U.S. 577 \(1992\).](#)

[Town of Greece, N.Y. v. Galloway, 572 U.S. 565 \(2014\).](#)

[Shurtleff v. City of Boston, 596 U.S. 243 \(2022\).](#)

[Nussbaumer v. Secretary, Florida Department of Children and Families, 150 F.4th 1371 \(11th Cir. 2025\).](#)

BILL HISTORY

COMMITTEE REFERENCE	ACTION	DATE	STAFF DIRECTOR/ POLICY CHIEF	ANALYSIS PREPARED BY
Human Services Subcommittee	17 Y, 0 N	1/13/2026	Mitz	DesRochers
Judiciary Committee				
Health & Human Services Committee				

³⁴ *Id.* at 1381. Specifically, DCF took issue with the psychologist's faith-based BIP approach and patient-specific counseling for anger management and substance abuse issues. *Id.* at 1376.

³⁵ *Id.* at 1379.

³⁶ *Id.* at 1380.