

**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.)

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Prepared By: The Professional Staff of the Appropriations Committee on Criminal and Civil Justice

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BILL: CS/SB 656

INTRODUCER: Criminal Justice Committee and Senator Bradley

SUBJECT: Internet Crimes Against Children Programs

DATE: January 27, 2026

REVISED: \_\_\_\_\_

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	<u>Parker</u>	<u>Stokes</u>	<u>CJ</u>	<b>Fav/CS</b>
2.	<u>Kolich</u>	<u>Harkness</u>	<u>ACJ</u>	<b>Favorable</b>
3.	<u>                    </u>	<u>                    </u>	<u>FP</u>	<u>                    </u>

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**Please see Section IX. for Additional Information:**

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE - Substantial Changes

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**I. Summary:**

CS/SB 656 amends s. 943.0411, F.S., to change the Online Sting Operations Grant Program for local law enforcement to the “Internet Crimes Against Children Grant Program” to award grants to local law enforcement affiliates to support their work to combat online child exploitation and to target individuals preying upon children online or attempting to prey upon children online.

The bill defines the terms “affiliate,” “good standing,” and “internet crimes against children task force.”

The Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE) must annually award local law enforcement affiliates any funds specifically appropriated for the grant program to cover expenses related to their work to combat Internet crimes against children. The funds may be awarded to cover overtime pay, travel, investigative or digital forensic training, hardware and software. Grants must be provided to local law enforcement agencies, if funds are appropriated for that purpose of law. The total amount of grants awarded may not exceed funding appropriated for the grant program.

The bill creates s. 943.0421, F.S., named the “Florida Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force Funding Program Act,” to establish a funding program to provide a stable funding source for the internet crimes against children task forces. The bill provides that the Legislature intends to create an account dedicated to combating Internet crimes against children, promoting

education on Internet safety to minors and to the public, and rescuing child victims from abuse and exploitation.

The funds may be used only to support the administration and activities of law enforcement agencies in their efforts to combat Internet crimes against children. Money appropriated to the program must be distributed with eighty percent divided equally among the task forces and twenty percent to the FDLE.

The bill has a significant negative fiscal impact to the FDLE related to the creation of the task force funding program; however, the program is subject to legislative appropriation. See Section V., Fiscal Impact Statement.

The bill takes effect on July 1, 2026.

## **II. Present Situation:**

### **Online Crimes Against Children**

Local law enforcement agencies routinely conduct sting operations targeting online predators who intend to commit crimes against children. A sting operation generally consists of an opportunity to commit a crime created or exploited by police, a targeted likely offender or group of offenders for a particular crime type, an undercover or hidden law enforcement officer or surrogate, and the eventual arrest of the likely offender or group of offenders.<sup>1</sup>

Sting operations in Florida are typically orchestrated by local law enforcement agencies, sometimes in cooperation with federal agencies like the FBI or ICE. The process generally starts with law enforcement officers setting up fake online profiles, posing as underage minors or as adults willing to arrange meetings with minors. These officers use social media platforms, dating apps, and various online forums to interact with individuals.<sup>2</sup>

On January 7, 2026, a Leon County high school basketball coach was arrested in an undercover operation conducted by the FDLE after investigators say he believed he was chatting with a 15-year-old girl online, part of Florida's ongoing crackdown on child exploitation.<sup>3</sup>

On December 15, 2025, the FDLE arrested Martin Theodore Cassady, 60, and Jorge Nieto, 39, charging each with 40 counts of possession of child sexual abuse material. These arrests are the result of the FDLE's statewide efforts to locate and arrest criminals targeting children and sharing files depicting the sexual abuse of children. The FDLE's investigation into Cassady began in April after the FDLE Cybercrime Task Force agents received a cybertip from the

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<sup>1</sup> United States Department of Justice *Sting Operations*, Graeme R. Newman available at <https://www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/sting-operations> (last visited January 22, 2026).

<sup>2</sup> Musca Law *Understanding How Child Sex Sting Operations Work in Florida* available at <https://www.muscalaw.com/blog/understanding-how-child-sex-sting-operations-work-florida> (last visited January 22, 2026).

<sup>3</sup> ABC News 3, *Florida high school girls' basketball coach arrested after sting targeting child predators* by Skyler Shepard, available at <https://weartv.com/news/local/florida-high-school-girls-basketball-coach-arrested-after-sting-targeting-child-predators-florida-department-of-law-enforcement-south-florida-treasure-coast-news-leon-county-january-13-2026> (last visited January 22, 2026).

National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) that an internet user uploaded and shared over 1,500 digital images and video files depicting the sexual abuse of children into an email account. While conducting a search warrant, agents seized an anatomically correct, child-like sex doll that was in Cassidy's possession at the time of the search warrant. The FDLE Cybercrime Task Force consists of agents from the Altamonte Springs Police Department, Apopka Police Department, Kissimmee Police Department, Lake County Sheriff's Office, Ocoee Police Department and the Sanford Police Department.<sup>4</sup>

On July 30, 2025, Attorney General James Uthmeier announced the arrest of 48 individuals, including six foreign nationals flagged with ICE detainers, following a six-day undercover operation targeting online child predators. The operation, coordinated by the Marion County Sheriff's Office, marks the highest number of arrests ever made during this annual joint effort to protect Florida children from exploitation and abuse. Attorney General Uthmeier's Office of Statewide Prosecution partnered with nine law enforcement agencies across local, state, and federal levels to identify and apprehend suspects attempting to meet children for sex or send them harmful material online.<sup>5</sup>

### ***Child Exploitation and Crimes Against Children Program***

The 1994 Legislature created the Crimes Against Children Criminal Profiling Program (CACPP) within the FDLE.<sup>6</sup> The program is required to perform investigative, intelligence, research, and training activities related to child exploitation and other crimes against children.

The networking and sharing of intelligence and investigative data enhances the existing communications network of the Florida Investigative Support Center (FISC) within the FDLE. This database enables the FDLE personnel to identify patterns and movements of specific criminal activities. In addition, it provides local law enforcement investigators with a statewide medium through which they share criminal information. Special Agents of the CACPP have received extensive training in the area of crimes against children. Consequently, members of this program are qualified to investigate multi-jurisdictional operations and organized crimes against children. In addition, investigative and technical assistance is provided to local law enforcement agencies.<sup>7</sup> As a result, the program was changed in 2025 to the Child Exploitation and Crimes Against Children Program.<sup>8</sup>

Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force Program (ICAC)The Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force program (ICAC) is a national network of 61 coordinated task forces,

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<sup>4</sup> Florida Department of Law Enforcement *FDLE Arrests Multiple in Child Sexual Abuse Material Investigations*, available at <https://www.fdle.state.fl.us/news/2025/december/fdle-news-release-fdle-arrests-multiple-in-child-sexual-abuse-material-investigations> (last visited January 22, 2026).

<sup>5</sup> Office of Attorney General James Uthmeier *Announces 48 Arrests, 153 Charges In Record-Breaking Undercover Child Predator Operation in Central Florida*, available at <https://www.myfloridalegal.com/newsrelease/attorney-general-james-uthmeier-announces-48-arrests-153-charges-record-breaking> (last visited January 22, 2026).

<sup>6</sup> Chapter 94-265, s. 9, Laws of Fla.

<sup>7</sup> Florida Department of Law Enforcement, *Agency Bill Analysis SB1268* (Department of Law Enforcement) on file with the Senate Criminal Justice Committee).

<sup>8</sup> Section 943.041, F.S.

representing over 5,400 federal, state, and local law enforcement, dedicated to investigating, prosecuting and developing effective responses to internet crimes against children.<sup>9</sup>

The ICAC Task Force program was developed in 1998, in response to an ever-increasing number of children and teenagers using the Internet, an ever-increasing number of online images depicting child sexual abuse, and an ever-increasing amount of online activity by people seeking to contact and exploit children and teens.

The ICAC helps state and local law enforcement agencies develop an effective response to technology-facilitated child sexual exploitation and Internet crimes against children. This assistance encompasses forensic and investigative components, training and technical assistance, victim services, and community education.<sup>10</sup>

The ICAC task forces consist of state and local investigators, prosecutors, forensic specialists, and education specialists who are dedicated to addressing the goals of such task force. The following list contains the duties and functions of the task forces:

- Work consistently toward achieving designated purposes;
- Engage in proactive investigations, forensic examinations, and effective prosecutions of Internet crimes against children;
- Provide forensic, preventive, and investigative assistance to parents, educators, prosecutors, law enforcement, and others concerned with Internet crimes against children;
- Develop multijurisdictional, multiagency responses and partnerships to Internet crimes against children offenses through ongoing informational, administrative, and technological support to other State and local law enforcement agencies, as a means for such agencies to acquire the necessary knowledge, personnel, and specialized equipment to investigate and prosecute such offenses;
- Participate in nationally coordinated investigations in any case in which the Attorney General determines such participation to be necessary, as permitted by the available resources of such task force;
- Establish or adopt investigative and prosecution standards, consistent with established norms, to which such task force shall comply;
- Investigate, seek prosecution on, tips related to Internet crimes against children, including tips from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children's CyberTipline, ICAC task forces, and other Federal, State, and local agencies;
- Develop procedures for handling seized evidence;
- Maintain reports and records; and
- Seek to comply with national standards regarding the investigation and prosecution of Internet crimes against children, as set forth by the Attorney General, to the extent such standards are consistent with the law of the State where the task force is located.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> ICAC Task Force Program, available at <https://www.icactaskforce.org/> (last visited January 22, 2026).

<sup>10</sup> Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention *Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force Program* available at <https://ojjdp.ojp.gov/programs/internet-crimes-against-children-task-force-program#:~:text=Resources-Overview,and%20prosecute%20ICAC%2Drelated%20cases>. (last visit January 22, 2026).

<sup>11</sup> 34 U.S.C. § 21114, as amended by P.L. 119-60, December 18, 2025, 139 Stat. 718.

### **FDLE Online Sting Operation Grant Program**

In 2024, the Florida Legislature created the Online Sting Operations Grant Program within the FDLE to support local law enforcement agencies in developing and conducting sting operations aimed at identifying and targeting individuals who prey upon, or attempt to prey upon, children online.<sup>12</sup>

Under the program, the FDLE is required to annually award to law enforcement agencies any funds specifically appropriated for the grant program. Such funds must be used to cover expenses related to computers, electronics, software, and other related necessary supplies. The total amount of grants awarded may not exceed funding appropriated for the grant program.<sup>13</sup>

The department may establish criteria and set specific time periods for the acceptance of applications and for the selection process for awarding grant funds.<sup>14</sup>

#### ***Eligibility***

The program is open to local law enforcement agencies in the State of Florida and for FY 2025-2026 is a cost reimbursement grant. Additional requirements are:

- Applicants must be a signed affiliate with its regional Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) Task Force. Applicants must obtain and attach to the application a letter of support from their agency ICAC Commander.
  - To qualify for a letter of support, the ICAC Commander will review the following requirements:
    - Individuals using requested equipment have attended required ICAC training.
    - The agency adheres to ICAC standards.
- Renewal costs for requested equipment and software beyond the grant period must be covered by the recipient agency.
- Recipients must provide performance measures each month along with the reimbursement claim such as the number of arrests made, children rescued, seizures, victims identified, and digital devices examined.<sup>15</sup>

#### ***Awards/Allowable/Unallowable Costs***

Available funds are distributed based on the operational needs of each agency's investigations as approved by the FDLE, not to exceed a combined total of \$2,500,000.<sup>16</sup>

Award funds must be used to support the creation or execution of online sting operations to target individuals soliciting children online. Grant funds may be used to reimburse expenses related to computers, electronics, software, and other related necessary supplies.

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<sup>12</sup> Chapter 2024-72, s. 1, Laws of Fla.

<sup>13</sup> Section 943.0411(2), F.S.

<sup>14</sup> Section 943.0411(3), F.S.

<sup>15</sup> Florida Department of Law Enforcement *Online Sting Operations Grant Program for Local Law Enforcement* available at <https://www.fdle.state.fl.us/fdle-grants/open-funding-opportunities/online-sting/fy25-26-online-sting> (last visited January 22, 2026).

<sup>16</sup> *Id.*

Items purchased prior to the start of the grant period are unallowable. Additional unallowable costs for this program include but are not limited to personnel costs, community outreach and education activities, food and beverage, and transportation or travel costs.<sup>17</sup>

The FDLE is currently a partner with the three Florida Internet Crimes Against Children Task Forces. The FDLE support the task forces' ongoing efforts to protect children online. The FDLE also has seven regional teams that conduct online child exploitation-related investigations and supports the criminal investigations' digital forensics.<sup>18</sup>

### III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

The bill amends s. 943.0411, F.S., to rename the "Online Sting Operations Grant Program," the "Internet Crimes Against Children Grant Program." The grant program will provide funding to local law enforcement affiliates to protect children by providing support for their work to combat online child exploitation and to target individuals preying upon children online or attempting to prey upon children online.

The FDLE must annually award to local law enforcement affiliates any funds specifically appropriated for the grant program to cover expenses related to their work to combat Internet crimes against children. The funds may be awarded to cover overtime pay, travel, investigative or digital forensics training, hardware, or software. Grants must be provided to local law enforcement affiliates if funds are appropriated for that purpose by law. The total amount of grants awarded may not exceed funding appropriated for the grant program.

The bill defines the following terms:

- "Affiliate" to mean a local law enforcement agency in this state which has a current memorandum of understanding with an established Internet crimes against children task force or which has been designated by the FDLE as being in good standing.
- "Good standing" to mean a local law enforcement agency in this state that receives CyberTips from one of the task forces that follows Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force Program standards in its investigation of Internet crimes against children.
- "Internet crimes against children task force" to mean an Internet crimes against task force located in this state which is recognized by the United States Department of Justice.

The bill creates s. 943.0421, F.S., to create the "Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force Funding Program," and provides the following legislative findings:

- The Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force Program, administered through the United States Department of Justice helps state and local law enforcement agencies develop an effective response to technology-facilitated child sexual exploitation and Internet crimes against children. This help encompasses forensic and investigative components, training and technical assistance, victim services, and community education. The program is a national network of 61 coordinated task forces representing over 5,400 federal, state, and local law enforcement and prosecutorial agencies.

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<sup>17</sup> *Id.*

<sup>18</sup> FDLE, 2026 FDLE Legislative Bill Analysis pg. 2 (on file with the Senate Committee on Criminal Justice).

- The Legislature intends to create an account dedicated to combating Internet crimes against children, promoting education on Internet safety to minors and to the public, and rescuing child victims from abuse and exploitation.

The Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force Funding Program within the FDLE is created to provide a stable funding source for the task forces. Funding for the program must consist of moneys appropriated by the Legislature. Program funds may be used only to support the administration and activities of law enforcement agencies in their efforts to combat Internet crimes against children, including the funding of personnel, overtime pay, training, travel, and technology purchases.

Moneys appropriated to the program must be distributed in the following amounts:

- Eighty percent divided equally among the task forces; and
- Twenty percent to FDLE to support its efforts in combating Internet crimes against children.

The term “task force” is defined to mean an Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force program located in this state which is recognized by the United States Department of Justice.

The department may adopt rules to implement and administer this act.

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 bill has a significant negative fiscal impact to the FDLE related to the creation of the task force funding program; however, the program is subject to legislative appropriation. For FY 2024-2025, the Legislature appropriated \$2,500,000 in nonrecurring funds from the General Revenue Fund to the FDLE for the Online Sting Operations Grant Program. The unexpended balance of funds from that year, \$1,745,426, was reverted and appropriated for FY 2025-2026 to FDLE for the same purpose.

**VI. Technical Deficiencies:**

None.

**VII. Related Issues:**

None.

**VIII. Statutes Affected:**

This bill substantially amends section 943.0411 of the Florida Statutes.

This bill creates section 943.0421 of the Florida Statutes.

**IX. Additional Information:****A. Committee Substitute – Statement of Substantial Changes:**

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

**CS by Criminal Justice on January 20, 2026:**

The committee substitute:

- Defines the term “Good standing” to mean a local law enforcement agency in this state that receives CyberTips from one of the task forces and follows Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force Program standards in its investigation of Internet crimes against children.
- Revises legislative findings.

**B. Amendments:**

None.



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

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