

# FLORIDA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES BILL ANALYSIS

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**BILL #:** [HB 85](#)

**TITLE:** Swimming Lesson Voucher Program

**SPONSOR(S):** Kendall

**COMPANION BILL:** [SB 428](#) (Yarborough)

**LINKED BILLS:** None

**RELATED BILLS:** [SB 428](#) (Yarborough)

## Committee References

[Health Professions & Programs](#)

16 Y, 0 N

[Health Care Budget](#)

[Health & Human Services](#)

## SUMMARY

### Effect of the Bill:

Drowning is the leading cause of accidental death of children in Florida. To help reduce the risk of drownings and water related injuries, the Swimming Lesson Voucher Program provides free swimming lessons, through a voucher system, to eligible low-income Florida residents with children age four or younger. The bill revises the age eligibility requirement for children to qualify for vouchers under the Swimming Lesson Voucher Program from age four or younger to age one to seven.

### Fiscal or Economic Impact:

None

[JUMP TO](#)

[SUMMARY](#)

[ANALYSIS](#)

[RELEVANT INFORMATION](#)

[BILL HISTORY](#)

## ANALYSIS

### EFFECT OF THE BILL:

#### Swimming Lesson Voucher Program

Florida's [Swimming Lesson Voucher Program](#) (SLVP) provides free swimming lessons to eligible Florida residents with children age four or younger who have a household income at or below 200% of the federal poverty level. The bill revises the current age eligibility requirement for children to qualify for vouchers under the SLVP from age four and under to ages one to seven. Children under the age one will no longer be eligible to receive vouchers through the SLVP.

## RELEVANT INFORMATION

### SUBJECT OVERVIEW:

#### Water Safety and Drowning Prevention

##### Accidental Drownings

Approximately 4,000 to 4,500 unintentional drowning deaths occur each year in the U.S.<sup>1</sup> That is an average of roughly 11 fatal drownings per day.<sup>2</sup> Drowning is the leading cause of death in the U.S. for children ages one to four

<sup>1</sup> National Drowning Prevention Alliance (NDPA), *Drowning Quick Facts*, available at <https://ndpa.org/drowning-facts-and-data/> and Center for Disease Control and Prevention, *Drowning Prevention: Drowning Facts*, available at <https://www.cdc.gov/drowning/data-research/facts/index.html>, (last visited December 2, 2025).

<sup>2</sup> Center for Disease Control and Prevention, *Drowning Prevention: Drowning Facts*, available at <https://www.cdc.gov/drowning/data-research/facts/index.html>, (last visited December 2, 2025).

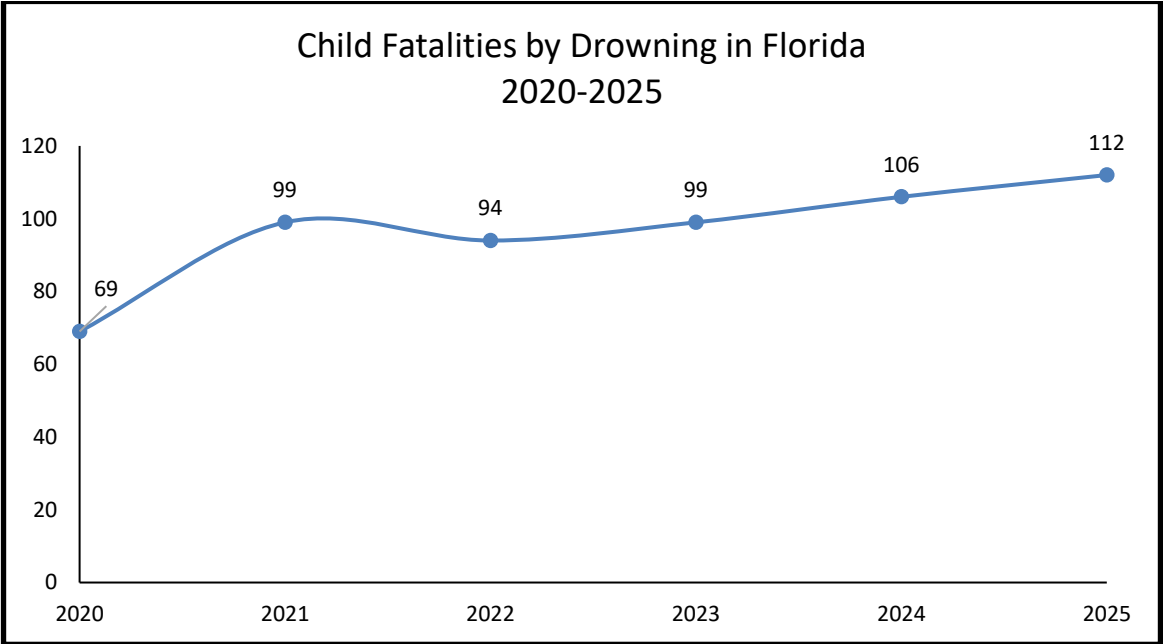
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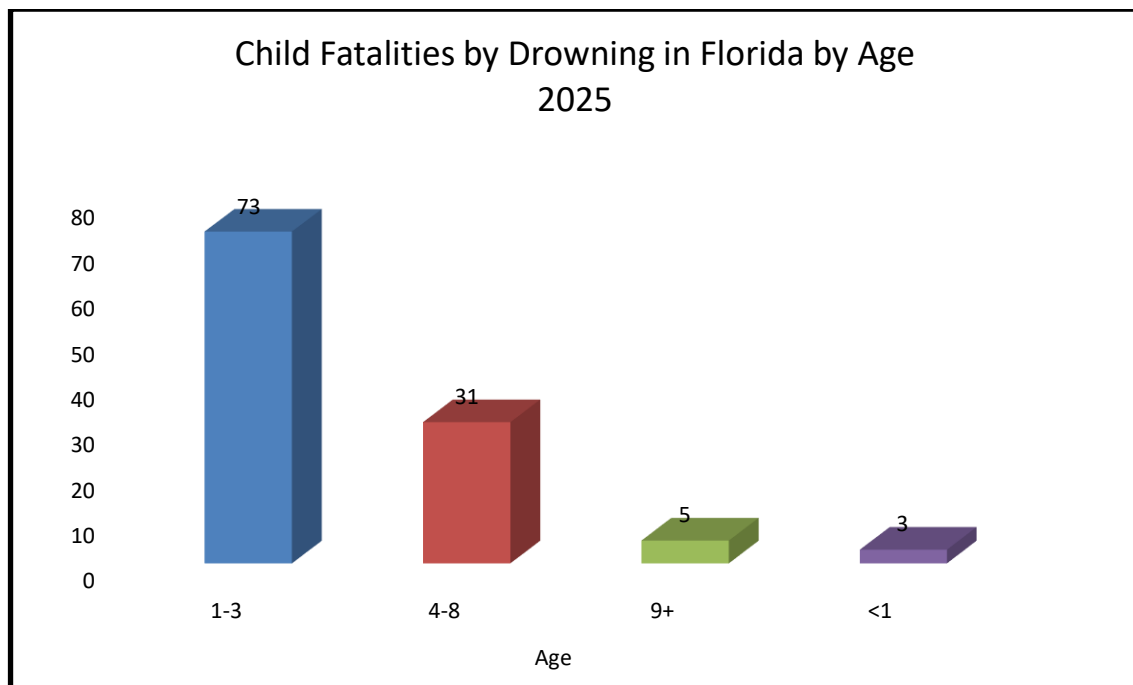
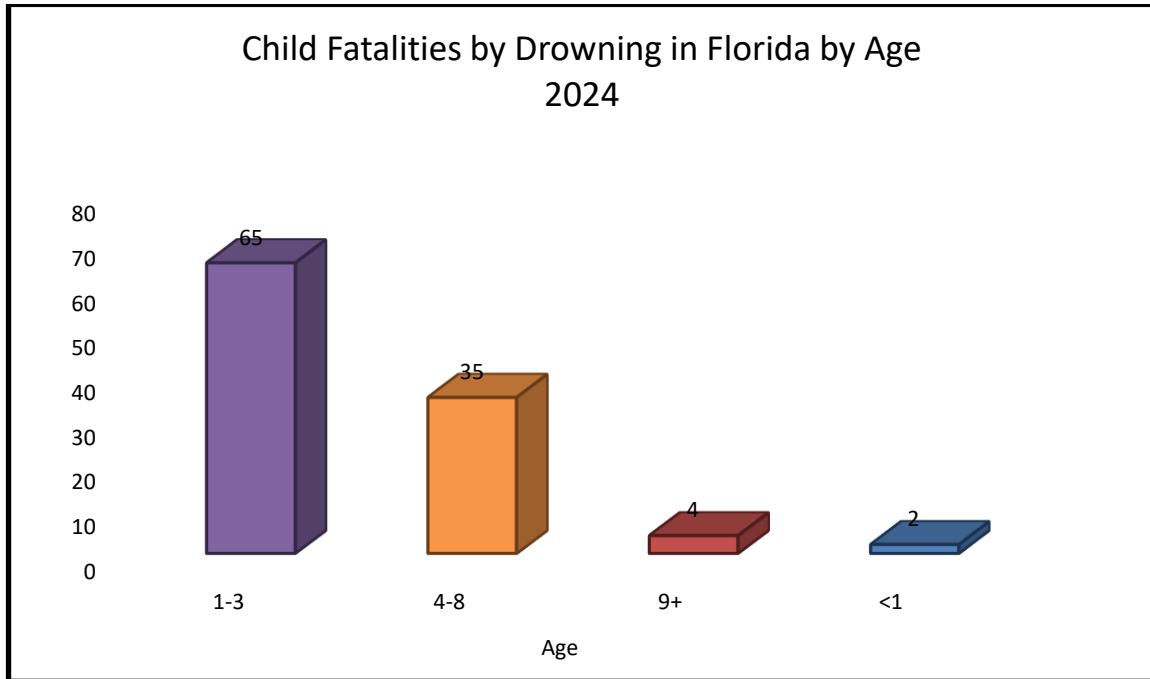
and the second leading cause of death for children ages five to 14.<sup>3</sup> Young children are particularly at a high risk of drowning due to their underdeveloped ability to assess risk and a lack of swimming and water safety skills.<sup>4</sup>

Drowning is also the leading cause of accidental death in Florida for children ages five and under.<sup>5</sup> Last year, 106 children in Florida died from accidental drowning and 112 in 2025.<sup>6</sup> Most of these deaths (87.7%) in 2024 and (83.9%) in 2025 were children ages five and under.<sup>7</sup> Sixty-one percent (61%) and 65 percent of child drownings in Florida in 2024 and 2025, respectively, were children between ages one and three.<sup>8</sup> According to the Center for Disease Control’s national injury data, in 2019-2021, Florida ranked highest in the nation for unintentional drowning deaths among children ages one to four and ages zero to nine.<sup>9</sup>

The following charts show child drownings in Florida for 2020-2025.<sup>10</sup>



<sup>3</sup> *Id.*  
<sup>4</sup> World Health Organization, *Drowning* (December 2024) available at <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/drowning#:~:text=Drowning%20is%20the%20process%20of%20experiencing%20respiratory,of%20death%20for%20child ren%20aged%205%E2%80%9314%20years.>, (last visited December 2, 2025).  
<sup>5</sup> State Child Abuse Death Review Committee, *Florida Child Abuse Death Review Annual Report 2024*, available at <https://www.flcadr.com/documents/2024-CADR-Annual-Report.pdf>, (last visited December 2, 2025).  
<sup>6</sup> Department of Children and Families, *Child Fatality Prevention Dashboard*, available at [https://www.myflfamilies.com/\\_childfatality](https://www.myflfamilies.com/_childfatality), (last visited December 2, 2025).  
<sup>7</sup> *Id.*  
<sup>8</sup> *Id.*  
<sup>9</sup> Department of Health, *Drowning Prevention*, available at <https://www.floridahealth.gov/programs-and-services/prevention/drowning-prevention/index.html>, (last visited December 2, 2025).  
<sup>10</sup> *Id.* at note 6.



### Swimming Lessons

Learning to swim is a key strategy for reducing accidental drowning deaths. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends swimming lessons as a layer of protection against drowning for children starting as early as age one.<sup>11</sup> The AAP also recommends that children ages four and older learn to swim, including through swim

<sup>11</sup> According to the AAP, there is currently no evidence that swim programs for children under age one lower their risk of drowning. See, Health Children.Org, *Swim Lessons: When to Start & What Parents Should Know*, available at <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/safety-prevention/at-play/Pages/swim->

lessons that provide instruction on swimming techniques and water survival skills taught by instructors certified through a nationally recognized curriculum.<sup>12</sup>

Studies show that water survival skills and participation in formal swimming lessons reduces the risk of drowning by 88 percent for children ages one to four.<sup>13</sup> Participation in swimming lessons has also been shown to reduce drowning risks among children ages 1 to 19. Evidence suggest that teaching children water competency skills causes no increased risk, particularly if combined with other components of water safety and drowning prevention strategies.<sup>14</sup>

Under current law, any person working as a swimming instructor or lifeguard at a public swimming pool in Florida must be certified by the American Red Cross, the Y.M.C.A., or other nationally recognized aquatic training programs. Swimming instructors and lifeguards must also be certified in first aid and CPR.<sup>15</sup>

Swimming Lesson Voucher Program

The Swimming Lesson Voucher Program (SLVP) was created within the Department of Health (DOH) in 2024.<sup>16</sup> The purpose of the program is to increase water safety and prevent drownings in Florida.<sup>17</sup> The program provides free vouchers for swimming lessons to Florida residents with children ages four and under with a household income at or below 200% of the federal poverty level.<sup>18</sup> The program prioritizes children with autism and active-duty military families who meet the eligibility requirements.<sup>19</sup> Through the program, eligible families receive vouchers redeemable for eight 30-minute swim lessons.<sup>20</sup> Vendors authorized to accept vouchers through the SLVP are reimbursed by DOH at a flat rate of \$200 for each complete eight lesson voucher.<sup>21</sup>

During the first year of the SLVP (Fiscal Year (FY) 2024-2025), DOH received 16,663 applications and awarded 4,945 vouchers.<sup>22</sup> The bar graph below shows the number of swim vouchers applications received and awarded, by age, for FY 2024-2025.<sup>23</sup>

[lessons.aspx? gl=1\\*oenf1s\\* ga\\*NzEzMzcxODAwLjE3NjQ3ODk4NzE.\\* ga FD9D3XZVQQ\\*cze3NjQ3ODk4NzAkbnzEkZzAkdDE3NjQ3ODk4NzAkajYwJGwwJGgw.](#) (last visited December 3, 2025).

<sup>12</sup> American Academy of Pediatrics, Swim Lessons: When to Start & What Parents Should Know, <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/safety-prevention/at-play/Pages/swim-lessons.aspx>, (last visited December 3, 2025).

<sup>13</sup> National Institute of Health, *Association Between Swimming Lessons and Drowning in Childhood*, Archives Pediatric Medicine, Vol 163 No 3, March 2009, available at [https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4151293/pdf/\\_nihms617357.pdf](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4151293/pdf/_nihms617357.pdf), (last visited December 3, 2025).

<sup>14</sup> National Library of Medicine, *Learning to Swim: An Exploration of Negative Prior Aquatic Experiences Among Children*, [Int J Environ Res Public Health](#), 2020 May; 17(10): 3557., available at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7277817/#:~:text=Participation%20in%20formal%20swimming%20lessons,the%20additional%20drowning%20prevention%20strategies>, (last visited December 3, 2025).

<sup>15</sup> [S. 514.074, F.S.](#)

<sup>16</sup> [S. 514.073, F.S.](#)

<sup>17</sup> Water Smart FL, *Swimming Lesson Voucher Program*, available at <https://www.watersmartfl.com/>, (last visited December 3, 2025).

<sup>18</sup> [S. 514.073\(2\), F.S.](#)

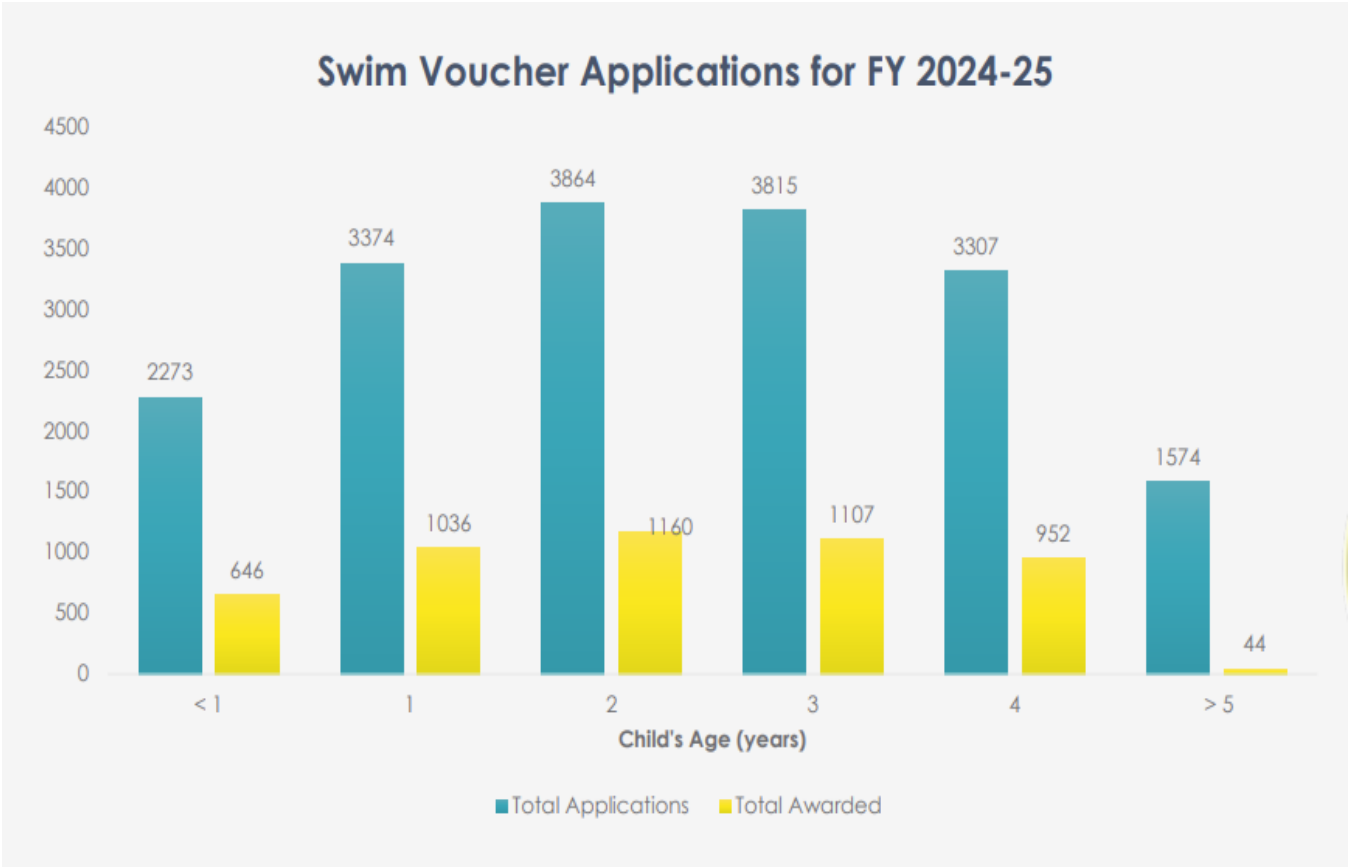
<sup>19</sup> DOH, *Agency Bill Analysis* (2026), on file with the House Health Services Subcommittee.

<sup>20</sup> *Id.*

<sup>21</sup> *Id.* DOH partners with community vendors to provide free swimming lessons through the SLVP. Also see, DOH, *Swimming Lesson Voucher Vendors*, at <https://okaloosa.floridahealth.gov/programs-and-services/community-health-planning-and-statistics/SwimmingVoucherVendors.html>, (last visited December 3, 2025).

<sup>22</sup> *Id.* at note 21.

<sup>23</sup> DOH, *Implementation Briefing on Legislation Passed During the 2024-2025 Sessions*, presented at the House Health Professions and Programs Subcommittee, October 7, 2025, on file with the House Health Professions and Programs Subcommittee.



For FY 2025-2026, DOH received \$1,000,000 from the Legislative for the SLVP. The department expects to award approximately 5,250 vouchers for swimming lessons in FY 2025-2026.<sup>24</sup>

**RECENT LEGISLATION:**

YEAR	BILL #/SUBJECT	HOUSE/SENATE SPONSOR(S)	OTHER INFORMATION
2024	<a href="#">CS/SB 544</a> - Swimming Lesson Voucher Program	Busatta/ Hutson	2024-89 L.O.F.

**OTHER RESOURCES:**

[Water Smart Florida](#)

## BILL HISTORY

COMMITTEE REFERENCE	ACTION	DATE	STAFF DIRECTOR/ POLICY CHIEF	ANALYSIS PREPARED BY
<a href="#">Health Professions &amp; Programs Subcommittee</a>	16 Y, 0 N	12/9/2025	McElroy	Curry
<a href="#">Health Care Budget Subcommittee</a>				
<a href="#">Health &amp; Human Services Committee</a>				