

**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 Committee on Children, Families, and Elder Affairs

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BILL: SB 230

INTRODUCER: Senator Dean

SUBJECT: Missing Persons with Special Needs

DATE: October 21, 2015

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

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	<u>Erickson</u>	<u>Cannon</u>	<u>CJ</u>	<b>Favorable</b>
2.	<u>Preston</u>	<u>Hendon</u>	<u>CF</u>	<b>Favorable</b>
3.	_____	_____	<u>AP</u>	_____

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**I. Summary:**

SB 230 creates the “Project Leo” pilot project in Baker, Columbia, Hamilton, and Suwanee counties to provide personal devices to aid search-and-rescue efforts for persons with special needs in the case of elopement.

The project is developed and administered by the Center for Autism and Related Disabilities at the University of Florida (“CARD/UF”). The bill directs the CARD/UF to develop criteria for selecting project participants. The CARD/UF selects qualifying participants on a first-come, first-served basis to the extent that funding is available. The project is voluntary and free to participants. The CARD/UF distributes the personal devices to the sheriff’s offices of the participating counties. The CARD/UF funds any device monitoring costs.

The CARD/UF submits preliminary and final reports to the Governor, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, and the President of the Senate. The final report must include recommendations for modifications or continued implementation of the project.

The bill appropriates \$100,000 from the General Revenue Fund to the CARD/UF for FY 2016-2017 for the purpose of implementing this act.

**II. Present Situation:**

**Elopement of Individuals with Special Needs**

Elopement, also referred to as wandering, is a safety issue that affects some individuals with disabilities, their families, and the community. Wandering is when someone leaves a safe area or

a responsible caregiver. This typically includes situations where the person may be injured or harmed as a result.<sup>1</sup>

### **Elopement and Wandering of Individuals with Autism**

Elopement in children with autism might include running off from adults at school or in the community, leaving the classroom without permission, or leaving the house when the family is not looking. This behavior is considered common and short-lived in toddlers, but it may persist or re-emerge in children and adults with autism. Children with autism have challenges with social and communication skills and safety awareness. This makes wandering a potentially dangerous behavior.<sup>2</sup>

There are various reasons someone with autism may wander; more often than not, he or she will wander to something of interest (especially bodies of water) or away from something that is bothersome or stressful (such as uncomfortable noise or bright lights).<sup>3</sup>

Approximately 50 percent of children with autism have a tendency to wander or elope.<sup>4</sup> Families report that about half of those children who have a tendency to wander succeeded and went missing long enough to cause serious concern. A substantial portion of those children who wander are at risk for bodily harm.<sup>5</sup> Of those children who went missing, 24 percent were in danger of drowning and 65 percent were in danger of traffic injury.<sup>6</sup>

### **Elopement and Wandering of Individuals with Alzheimer's Disease**

Wandering and elopement can also be dangerous for individuals with Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia. The individual may not remember his or her name or address in order to assist rescuers. They can become disoriented even in familiar places. An individual with Alzheimer's disease who wanders or elopes is most often looking for someone or something familiar, escaping a source of stress or anxiety, or may be reliving the past.<sup>7</sup>

Statistics indicate that in the U.S., more than 34,000 individuals with Alzheimer's disease wander out of their homes or care facilities each year.<sup>8</sup> Six in 10 people with some type of

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<sup>1</sup>“Wandering (Elopement),” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, available at <http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandsafety/wandering.html> (last viewed on September 23, 2015).

<sup>2</sup> Information provided by the AWAARE Collaboration, available at <http://awaare.nationalautismassociation.org/> (last viewed on September 23, 2015).

<sup>3</sup> “Why is My Child Eloping and What Can I Do?,” Autism Community, available at <http://www.autism-community.com/why-is-my-child-elopeing-and-what-can-i-do/> (last viewed on September 23, 2015).

<sup>4</sup> Michelle Diamant, “Autism Wandering Poses ‘Critical Safety Issue,’ Survey Suggests,” *Autism Wandering Poses “Critical”* (April 21, 2011), disability scoop, available at <http://www.disabilityscoop.com/2011/04/21/autism-wandering-survey/12953/> (last viewed on September 23, 2015).

<sup>5</sup> Connie Anderston, et al., “Occurrence and Family Impact of Elopement in Children With Autism Spectrum Disorders,” *PEDIATRICS* (October 8, 2012), available at <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/early/2012/10/02/peds.2012-0762.full.pdf+html> (last viewed on September 23, 2015).

<sup>6</sup> *Id.*

<sup>7</sup> “Alzheimer’s: Understand wandering and how to address it,” Mayo Clinic, available at <http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-living/caregivers/in-depth/alzheimers/art-20046222> (last viewed on September 23, 2015).

<sup>8</sup> “Wandering and Elopement Resources,” National Council of Certified Dementia Practitioners, available at <http://www.nccdp.org/wandering.htm> (last viewed on September 23, 2015).

dementia will wander or elope;<sup>9</sup> additionally, it is estimated that 11-24 percent of institutionalized dementia patients wander.<sup>10</sup>

Anti-wandering and GPS tracking devices can be worn as a bracelet, attached to an individual's shoe or belt loop or even sewn into clothing. In the event that an individual goes missing, a caregiver can utilize products and services from the monitoring company for the device to pinpoint the wearer's location. There are a number of anti-wandering and GPS tracking devices on the market that can aid in search and rescue for individuals with special needs who are prone to wander. Two examples are the Protect and Locate (PAL) tracking system through Project Lifesaver and the Amber Alert GPS.

- The PAL is a tracking device that is worn as a watch by the individual at risk of wandering and has a companion portable receiver which notifies the caregiver of a wandering event. Through the use of cell ID location and GPS technologies, it provides the location of a wearer accurate to nine feet.<sup>11</sup> If an individual wearing a PAL device wanders outside of a set perimeter, the caregiver's receiver will receive an alert and the caregiver will receive an email alert and the device will send a text message with the date and location of the wandering event.<sup>12</sup>

Additionally, a caregiver can press the "find" button on his or her receiver to have the location of the individual and the address displayed on the portable receiver. If the individual wearing the PAL watch/transmitter is lost, he or she can push the panic button on the PAL watch to have the current address shown on the caregiver's portable receiver.<sup>13</sup> The PAL tracking system costs \$249.99 per unit and requires a monitoring/service plan of \$29.95 per month.<sup>14</sup>

- The Amber Alert GPS is a small disk that can be put in an individual's purse or backpack or, with the purchase of an accessory, can be attached to the individual. The Amber Alert GPS syncs with an online tracking portal and mobile application for iPhone, Blackberry, and Droid cellular phones to provide the real-time location of the wearer.<sup>15</sup> It allows the caregiver to designate up to 20 "safe zones" and receive an alert each time a wearer leaves one of the designated safe zones. It also has a two-way voice feature to allow the caregiver and wearer to talk to each other through the device and an SOS button that the wearer can push in the event of an emergency to notify the caregiver and up to ten additional individuals.<sup>16</sup> Amber Alert GPS costs \$145 per unit and requires a monitoring/service plan of \$15-18 per month.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> "Wandering and Getting Lost," Alzheimer's Association, available at <http://www.alz.org/care/alzheimers-dementia-wandering.asp> (last viewed on September 23, 2015).

<sup>10</sup> See footnote 8.

<sup>11</sup> Information about PAL (Protect And Locate) Tracking System is available from Project Lifesaver at <http://www.projectlifesaver.org/Pal-info/> (last viewed on September 23, 2015).

<sup>12</sup> *Id.*

<sup>13</sup> *Id.*

<sup>14</sup> *Id.*

<sup>15</sup> Information about the Amber Alert GPS Smart Locator is available from Amber Alert GPS at <https://www.amberalertgps.com/products> (last viewed on September 23, 2015).

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

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

## Center for Autism and Related Disabilities

The Center for Autism and Related Disabilities (CARD/UF) works with families, caregivers, and professionals to optimize the potential of people with autism and related disabilities. The CARD/UF serves children and adults of all levels of intellectual functioning who have autism, autistic-like disabilities, pervasive developmental disorder, dual sensory impairments (hearing and vision impaired), or a vision or hearing loss with another disabling condition.<sup>18</sup> There are seven non-residential CARD centers across the state and the CARD/UF serves fourteen counties in North Central Florida.<sup>19</sup>

### III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

The bill creates s. 937.041, F.S., which creates the “Project Leo” pilot in Baker, Columbia, Hamilton, and Suwanee counties to provide personal devices to aid search-and-rescue efforts for persons with special needs in the case of elopement. The project is developed and administered by the CARD/UF.

The CARD/UF selects project participants based on criteria it develops, which must include, at a minimum, the individual’s risk of elopement. Participants are selected on a first-come, first-serve basis. The number of participants is determined based on available funding within the center’s existing resources.

Participation in the project is voluntary and free. Participants are provided a personal device to aid search and rescue efforts. This device is attachable to clothing or otherwise wearable. The CARD/UF distributes the personal devices to the sheriff’s offices of the participating counties. The CARD/UF funds any device monitoring costs.

The CARD/UF submits preliminary and final reports to the Governor, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, and the President of the Senate. Both reports must include all of the following:

- The criteria used to select the participants.
- The number of participants.
- The age of the participants.
- The nature of the participants’ special needs.
- The number of participants who elope.
- The amount of time taken to rescue a participant following elopement.
- The outcome of any rescue attempts.

Additionally, the final report must include recommendations for modifications or continued implementation of the project. The project operates to the extent of available funding within the center’s existing resources. Since the bill provides that s. 937.041, F.S., expires on June 30, 2018, the project effectively ends on that date.

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<sup>18</sup> “About CARD FAQ,” Center for Autism and Related Disabilities, University of Florida, available at <http://card.ufl.edu/about-card/faq/> (last viewed on September 23, 2015).

<sup>19</sup> *Id.* The counties served by the CARD/UF are Alachua, Bradford, Citrus, Columbia, Dixie, Gilchrist, Hamilton, Hernando, Lafayette, Levy, Marion, Putnam, Suwannee, and Union.

The bill appropriates \$100,000 from the General Revenue Fund to the CARD/UF for FY 2016-2017 for the purpose of implementing this act.

The effective date of the bill is July 1, 2016.

**IV. Constitutional Issues:**

A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:

None.

B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:

None.

C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

None.

**V. Fiscal Impact Statement:**

A. Tax/Fee Issues:

None.

B. Private Sector Impact:

None.

C. Government Sector Impact:

The number of participants is determined based on available funding within the existing resources of the CARD/UF. The CARD/UF distributes the personal devices to the sheriff's offices of the participating counties. The CARD/UF funds any device monitoring costs.

The bill provides \$100,000 from the General Revenue Fund to the CARD/UF for the purpose of implementing this act.

The Board of Governors states that there is no determinable fiscal impact to the state universities from the bill and the bill has no fiscal impact on the Board of Governors office.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> 2016 Legislative Bill Analysis (SB 230) (September 9, 2015), State University System of Florida Board of Governors (on file with the Senate Committee on Criminal Justice).

**VI. Technical Deficiencies:**

None.

**VII. Related Issues:**

None.

**VIII. Statutes Affected:**

This bill creates section 937.041 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.