

<b>Tab 1</b>	<b>SB 1376</b> by <b>Burgess (CO-INTRODUCERS) Sharief, Berman;</b> Similar to CS/H 01115 Grants for Genetic Counseling Education					
478534	A	S	RCS	HE, Burgess	Delete L.31 - 53:	01/28 10:53 AM
<b>Tab 2</b>	<b>SB 1570</b> by <b>Gaetz (CO-INTRODUCERS) Berman;</b> Identical to H 01405 Statewide Project for Missing Persons with Special Needs					

**The Florida Senate**  
**COMMITTEE MEETING EXPANDED AGENDA**

**EDUCATION POSTSECONDARY**

**Senator Calatayud, Chair**

**Senator Simon, Vice Chair**

**MEETING DATE:** Wednesday, January 28, 2026

**TIME:** 10:30 a.m.—12:30 p.m.

**PLACE:** 301 Senate Building

**MEMBERS:** Senator Calatayud, Chair; Senator Simon, Vice Chair; Senators Berman, Harrell, Jones, and Rodriguez

TAB	BILL NO. and INTRODUCER	BILL DESCRIPTION and SENATE COMMITTEE ACTIONS	COMMITTEE ACTION
1	<b>SB 1376</b> Burgess (Similar CS/H 1115)	Grants for Genetic Counseling Education; Creating the Genetic Counseling Education Enhancement Grant Program within the State University System; requiring the Board of Governors, subject to legislative appropriation, to award grant funds to state universities for specified purposes; requiring the program to reward excellence among genetic counseling programs based on specified criteria; prohibiting such funds from being used for specified purposes, etc.  HE 01/28/2026 Fav/CS AHE FP	Fav/CS Yeas 5 Nays 0
2	<b>SB 1570</b> Gaetz (Identical H 1405)	Statewide Project for Missing Persons with Special Needs; Amending a provision relating to the missing persons with special needs statewide project; providing that the project is created through the centers for autism and related disabilities; requiring that participants for the project be selected based on certain criteria, etc.  HE 01/28/2026 Favorable AHE FP	Favorable Yeas 5 Nays 0

Other Related Meeting Documents

**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 Education Postsecondary

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BILL: CS/SB 1376

INTRODUCER: Education Postsecondary Committee and Senators Burgess and Sharief

SUBJECT: Grants for Genetic Counseling Education

DATE: January 29, 2026

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

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	Jahnke	Bouck	HE	<b>Fav/CS</b>
2.			AHE	
3.			FP	

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

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE - Substantial Changes

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**I. Summary:**

CS/SB 1376 creates the Genetic Counseling Education Enhancement Grant Program within the State University System to support the development, growth, and sustainability of graduate genetic counseling programs accredited by the American Board of Genetic Counseling.

The bill requires the Board of Governors (BOG) to award competitive grants to state universities to address faculty shortages, student financial barriers, and clinical training needs. Grants may be awarded to establish new programs or support existing programs based on performance, including student completion and first-time board certification passage rates, with rewards for programs with above-average national certification results.

The bill requires grant funds to be used for recruiting and retaining faculty, providing scholarships to students, and establishing clinical rotations with healthcare partners. Funds may not be used for general administrative costs, facility construction, or unrelated activities. The bill requires universities receiving grants to maintain records of compliance and submit annual reports to the BOG, which will compile a statewide summary for submission to the Governor and Legislature. The BOG is also required to adopt regulations to administer the program.

The bill takes effect July 1, 2026.

## II. Present Situation:

### Genetic Disorders

Genetic disorders are diseases caused, in whole or in part, by changes in an individual's DNA sequence from the typical sequence. Such disorders may result from a mutation in a single gene, mutations in multiple genes, a combination of genetic mutations and environmental factors, or damage to chromosomes, including changes in the number or structure of chromosomes that carry genes. Research related to the human genome has shown that many diseases have a genetic component. Some genetic disorders result from inherited mutations present at birth, while others are caused by acquired mutations that occur during a person's lifetime and are not inherited.<sup>1</sup>

Genetic disorders include a wide range of conditions, such as chromosomal disorders including Down Syndrome and Fragile X syndrome; multifactorial disorders including late-onset Alzheimer's disease, arthritis, cancer in most cases, and spina bifida; and monogenic disorders including cystic fibrosis, sickle cell disease, and Tay-Sachs disease.<sup>2</sup>

### Genetic Counseling

Genetic counseling consists of advising individuals or families affected by, or at risk of, genetic disorders and is provided by licensed genetic counselors.<sup>3</sup> The scope of practice of genetic counseling includes:<sup>4</sup>

- Obtaining and evaluating individual, family, and medical histories to assess genetic risk for genetic or medical conditions and diseases;
- Discussing the features, diagnosis, genetic and environmental factors, and risk management related to genetic or medical conditions and diseases;
- Identifying, ordering, and coordinating genetic laboratory tests and other diagnostic studies as part of a genetic assessment;
- Integrating genetic test results and diagnostic studies with personal and family medical history to assess and communicate risk factors;
- Explaining the clinical implications of genetic tests, diagnostic studies, and their results;
- Evaluating individual or family responses to a condition or risk of recurrence and providing counseling and anticipatory guidance;
- Identifying and using community resources that provide medical, educational, financial, and psychosocial support and advocacy;
- Providing written documentation of medical, genetic, and counseling information for families and health care professionals; and
- Referring patients to a physician for diagnosis and treatment.

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<sup>1</sup> National Human Genome Research Institute, *Genetic Disorders*, <https://www.genome.gov/For-Patients-and-Families/Genetic-Disorders> (last visited Jan. 22, 2026).

<sup>2</sup> Cleveland Clinic, *Genetic Disorders*, <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/21751-genetic-disorders> (last visited Jan. 22, 2026). Chromosomal disorders affect the structures within each cell that hold genes or DNA. Multifactorial disorders stem from a combination of gene mutations and other factors, such as chemical exposure, diet, certain medications, and tobacco or alcohol use. Monogenic disorders are conditions caused by mutations in a single gene.

<sup>3</sup> Section 483.913(2)-(3), F.S.

<sup>4</sup> Section 483.913(3), F.S.

Genetic counselors practice across multiple specialties, including prenatal, pediatric, oncology, neurology, ophthalmology, psychiatry, and related clinical fields.<sup>5</sup> Since 1999, the profession has grown significantly. As of April 2024, there are 6,985 certified genetic counselors in the United States. The profession has grown by over 100 percent in the last ten years and is expected to grow another 100 percent over the next ten years.<sup>6</sup>

### Genetic Counseling Accreditation

In the United States, genetic counselors must complete a graduate-level genetic counseling program accredited by the Accreditation Council for Genetic Counseling (ACGC).<sup>7</sup> Graduation from an accredited program is required to sit for the certification examination administered by the American Board of Genetic Counseling (ABGC).<sup>8</sup> The ABGC certification process establishes national professional standards and assesses competency in areas such as genetics and genomics expertise, risk assessment, counseling, communication, healthcare systems, and professional identity.<sup>9</sup>

Florida law is consistent with these national standards. To be licensed as a genetic counselor in Florida, an applicant must hold a master's degree from a genetic counseling training program accredited by the ACGC, or an equivalent program, or a doctoral degree from a medical genetics training program accredited by the American Board of Medical Genetics and Genomics (ABMGG) or the Canadian College of Medical Geneticists (CCMG).<sup>10</sup> Applicants must also pass a recognized certification examination administered by the ABGC, the ABMGG, or the Canadian Association of Genetic Counsellors (CAGC).<sup>11</sup> The Florida Department of Health is also authorized to issue a temporary license to applicants who meet all licensure requirements except passage of the certification examination and who are eligible to sit for that examination.<sup>12</sup>

As of December 2024, there were 63 ACGC-accredited genetic counseling programs across the United States and Canada, with a total enrollment of 1,164 students.<sup>13</sup> The University of South Florida was the first university in Florida to offer an accredited graduate-level program in genetic

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<sup>5</sup> National Society of Genetic Counselors, *About Genetic Counselors*, <https://www.nsgc.org/About/About-Genetic-Counselors> (last visited Jan. 22, 2026).

<sup>6</sup> National Society of Genetic Counselors, *2024 Professional Status Survey Executive Summary* (2024), available at [https://www.nsgc.org/Portals/0/Docs/Policy/PSS%202024%20Executive%20Summary\\_Final.pdf](https://www.nsgc.org/Portals/0/Docs/Policy/PSS%202024%20Executive%20Summary_Final.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> Accreditation Council for Genetic Counseling, *Get Accredited*, <https://www.gceducation.org/get-accredited/> (last visited Jan. 22, 2026).

<sup>8</sup> American Board of Genetic Counseling, *About the CGC Credential*, <https://www.abgc.net/Certify/About-the-CGC-Credential> (last visited Jan. 22, 2026).

<sup>9</sup> Accreditation Council for Genetic Counseling, *Practice-Based Competencies for Genetic Counselors*, at 2-5 (2023), available at [https://www.nsgc.org/Portals/0/Docs/Education/ACGC-Core-Competencies-Brochure\\_15\\_Web.pdf](https://www.nsgc.org/Portals/0/Docs/Education/ACGC-Core-Competencies-Brochure_15_Web.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> Section 483.914(2)(d), F.S.

<sup>11</sup> Section 483.914(2)(e), F.S.

<sup>12</sup> Section 483.914(3), F.S.

<sup>13</sup> Accreditation Council for Genetic Counseling, *2024 ACGC Annual Accreditation Report* (2025), available at <https://www.gceducation.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/ACGC-2024-Annual-Report.pdf>.

counseling.<sup>14</sup> Florida State University plans to launch a Master's in Genetic Counseling program in Fall 2027.<sup>15</sup>

### III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

CS/SB 1376 creates s. 1009.8963, F.S., establishing the Genetic Counseling Education Enhancement Grant Program (program) within the State University System (SUS) to support the development, growth, and sustainability of graduate-level genetic counseling programs accredited by the Accreditation Council for Genetic Counseling.

The bill requires the Board of Governors (BOG) to award competitive grants to state universities to address faculty shortages, student financial barriers, and clinical training needs in genetic counseling. The BOG is required to award funds to:

- Establish an accredited program at a state university through a one-time start-up grant based on an application submitted in a format prescribed by the BOG. The application must include:
  - A detailed plan demonstrating how grant funds will be used to achieve program accreditation.
  - The projected outcomes of establishing the program, including all of the following: anticipated student enrollment; the plan for faculty hiring and retention; anticipated program completion rates; anticipated first-time American Board of Genetic Counseling Inc., board certification examination passage rates; and the program's anticipated contribution to Florida's genetic counseling workforce.
  - Documentation demonstrating that the proposed program is supported by sufficient clinical training capacity consistent with nationally recognized accreditation standards, and that the proposed growth represents a net increase in statewide training opportunities rather than redistribution of existing supervision resources.
- Accredited programs based on program performance according to the following metrics:
  - The number of students completing the genetic counseling program.
  - The first-time American Board of Genetic Counseling, Inc., board certification examination passage rate for students completing the state university's genetic counseling program.

The bill requires the program to reward excellence among genetic counseling programs with an average first-time ABGC board certification examination passage rate above the national average

The bill requires the grant funds provided through the program to be used for:

- The recruitment and retention of qualified faculty, including, but not limited to, salaries, professional development, and incentives.
- Financial assistance to students enrolled in the accredited program, which must be awarded as scholarships covering tuition, required books and materials, and reasonable living expenses.

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<sup>14</sup> USF Health, College of Public Health, *MSPH with a Concentration in Genetic Counseling*, <https://health.usf.edu/publichealth/apply/masters/msph-gc> (last visited Jan. 22, 2026).

<sup>15</sup> Florida State University, College of Medicine, *Master's in Genetic Counseling*, <https://med.fsu.edu/iprd/masters-degree-program-genetic-counseling> (last visited Jan. 22, 2026).

- The establishment and maintenance of clinical rotations required for completion of the master's degree in genetic counseling, including partnerships with health care facilities for supervised practicum experiences, simulation training resources, and faculty oversight.

The bill prohibits grant funds from being used for general administrative overhead costs, construction of new facilities, or non-program-related activities. State universities that receive a grant through the program are required to maintain records sufficient to demonstrate compliance with program requirements.

The bill requires each state university that receives program funds to submit an annual report to the BOG. The report must include program expenditures, the outcomes achieved using grant funds, and plans for the upcoming fiscal year. The bill also requires the BOG to compile the reports into an annual statewide summary. The summary must be submitted to the Governor, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives by July 1 of each year.

Additionally, the bill requires the BOG to adopt regulations to administer the program.

The bill takes effect July 1, 2026.

#### **IV. Constitutional Issues:**

##### **A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:**

None.

##### **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:**

This bill could have a significant impact on state expenditures for the Genetic Counseling Education Enhancement Grant Program. However, the grants are subject to an appropriation.

**VI. Technical Deficiencies:**

None.

**VII. Related Issues:**

None.

**VIII. Statutes Affected:**

This bill creates section 1009.8963 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 Education Postsecondary on January 28, 2026:**

The committee substitute clarifies the name of the accrediting body for eligible graduate-level genetic counseling programs by identifying the Accreditation Council for Genetic Counseling rather than the American Board of Genetic Counseling, Inc.

The committee substitute also adds a requirement to the grant application that the proposed program include documentation demonstrating sufficient clinical training capacity and that growth represents a net increase in statewide training opportunities, rather than a distribution of existing resources.

**B. Amendments:**

None.





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LEGISLATIVE ACTION

Senate	.	House
Comm: RCS	.	
01/28/2026	.	
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The Committee on Education Postsecondary (Burgess) recommended the following:

**Senate Amendment**

Delete lines 31 - 53  
and insert:  
genetic counseling programs accredited by the Accreditation Council for Genetic Counseling. The Board of Governors shall award competitive grants to state universities to address faculty shortages, student financial barriers, and clinical training needs in genetic counseling.  
(2) Subject to appropriation, the board shall award funds



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11 to:

12 (a) Establish an accredited program at a state university  
13 through a one-time start-up grant based upon an application  
14 submitted in a format prescribed by the board. The application  
15 must include:

16 1. A detailed plan demonstrating how grant funds will be  
17 used to achieve program accreditation.

18 2. The projected outcomes of establishing the program,  
19 including all of the following:

20 a. The anticipated program enrollment.

21 b. The plan for hiring and retaining faculty for the  
22 program.

23 c. The anticipated program completion rates.

24 d. The anticipated first-time American Board of Genetic  
25 Counseling board certification examination passage rates.

26 e. The anticipated program contributions to the state's  
27 genetic counseling workforce.

28 3. Documentation demonstrating that the proposed program is  
29 supported by sufficient clinical training capacity consistent  
30 with nationally recognized accreditation standards and that the  
31 proposed growth represents a net increase in statewide training  
32 opportunities rather than a redistribution of existing  
33 supervision resources.

By Senator Burgess

23-01386A-26

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A bill to be entitled

An act relating to grants for genetic counseling education; creating s. 1009.8963, F.S.; creating the Genetic Counseling Education Enhancement Grant Program within the State University System; providing the purpose of the program; requiring the Board of Governors, subject to legislative appropriation, to award grant funds to state universities for specified purposes; requiring the program to reward excellence among genetic counseling programs based on specified criteria; providing authorized uses of grant funds; prohibiting such funds from being used for specified purposes; requiring state universities participating in the program to maintain specified records; requiring such state universities to submit an annual report; requiring the Board of Governors to submit an annual summary of such reports to the Governor and Legislature by a specified date; requiring the Board of Governors to adopt regulations; providing an effective date.

Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:

Section 1. Section 1009.8963, Florida Statutes, is created to read:

1009.8963 The Genetic Counseling Education Enhancement Grant Program.-

(1) The Genetic Counseling Education Enhancement Grant Program is created within the State University System to support

Page 1 of 4

**CODING:** Words ~~stricken~~ are deletions; words underlined are additions.

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the development, growth, and sustainability of graduate level genetic counseling programs accredited by the American Board of Genetic Counseling, Inc. The Board of Governors shall award competitive grants to state universities to address faculty shortages, student financial barriers, and clinical training needs in genetic counseling.

(2) Subject to appropriation, the board shall award funds to:

(a) Establish an accredited program at a state university through a one-time start-up grant based upon an application submitted in a format prescribed by the board. The application must include:

1. A detailed plan demonstrating how grant funds will be used to achieve program accreditation.

2. The projected outcomes of establishing the program, including all of the following:

a. The anticipated program enrollment.

b. The plan for hiring and retaining faculty for the program.

c. The anticipated program completion rates.

d. The anticipated first-time American Board of Genetic Counseling, Inc., board certification examination passage rates.

e. The anticipated program contributions to the state's genetic counseling workforce.

(b) Accredited programs based on program performance according to the following metrics:

1. The number of students completing the genetic counseling program.

2. The first-time American Board of Genetic Counseling,

Page 2 of 4

**CODING:** Words ~~stricken~~ are deletions; words underlined are additions.

23-01386A-26

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Inc., board certification examination passage rate for students completing the state university's genetic counseling program.

The program shall reward excellence among genetic counseling programs with an average first-time American Board of Genetic Counseling, Inc., board certification examination passage rate above the national average.

(3) (a) Grant funds provided through the program must be used for:

1. The recruitment and retention of qualified faculty, including, but not limited to, salaries, professional development, and incentives.

2. Financial assistance to students enrolled in the accredited program. Such financial assistance must be in the form of scholarships that cover tuition, required books and materials, and reasonable living expenses.

3. The establishment and maintenance of clinical rotations required for completion of the master's degree in genetic counseling, including partnerships with health care facilities for supervised practicum experiences, simulation training resources, and faculty oversight.

(b) Grant funds may not be used for:

1. General administrative overhead costs.

2. The construction of new facilities.

3. Nonprogram-related activities.

(c) State universities that receive a grant through the program must maintain records sufficient to demonstrate compliance with this subsection.

(4) (a) Each state university receiving funds pursuant to

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this section shall submit an annual report to the board. The report must include:

1. Expenditures.

2. The outcomes achieved using grant funds.

3. Plans for the upcoming fiscal year for the program.

(b) The board shall annually compile the reports into a statewide summary. The summary must be submitted to the Governor, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives by July 1 of each year.

(5) The Board of Governors shall adopt regulations to administer this section.

Section 2. This act shall take effect July 1, 2026.

01/28/2026

**APPEARANCE RECORD**

SB 1376

Meeting Date

Education Postsecondary

Deliver both copies of this form to  
Senate professional staff conducting the meeting

Bill Number or Topic

Committee

Amendment Barcode (if applicable)

Name George Levesque Phone 850-577-9090Address 301 S. Bronough Street Email George.Levesque@gray-robinson.com  
StreetTallahassee FL 32301  
City State ZipSpeaking: ☐ For ☐ Against ☐ Information **OR** Waive Speaking: ☒ In Support ☐ Against**PLEASE CHECK ONE OF THE FOLLOWING:**☐ I am appearing without  
compensation or sponsorship.☒ I am a registered lobbyist,  
representing:☐ I am not a lobbyist, but received  
something of value for my appearance  
(travel, meals, lodging, etc.),  
sponsored by:

While it is a tradition to encourage public testimony, time may not permit all persons wishing to speak to be heard at this hearing. Those who do speak may be asked to limit their remarks so that as many persons as possible can be heard. If you have questions about registering to lobby please see Fla. Stat. §11.045 and Joint Rule 1. [2020-2022 Joint Rules.pdf \(flsenate.gov\)](#)

This form is part of the public record for this meeting.

S-001 (08/10/2021)

**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 Education Postsecondary

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BILL: SB 1570

INTRODUCER: Senator Gaetz

SUBJECT: Statewide Project for Missing Persons with Special Needs

DATE: January 27, 2026

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

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	Jahnke	Bouck	HE	<b>Favorable</b>
2.			AHE	
3.			FP	

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## **I. Summary:**

SB 1570 reestablishes the Missing Persons with Special Needs Statewide Project and implements the project through designated centers for autism and related disabilities. The bill specifies that centers that join the project have the responsibility for administering the project within their service areas, including establishing participant eligibility criteria based on elopement risk and ensuring participation is voluntary and provided at no cost.

The bill requires each participating Center for Autism and Related Disabilities (CARD or center) to provide personal search-and-rescue devices to county sheriffs' offices, requires sheriffs' offices to distribute the devices to project participants in coordination with the applicable center, and requires the centers to fund monitoring costs for the devices.

The bill also provides \$1 million in nonrecurring General Revenue funding for the 2026-2027 fiscal year to support the purchase of these devices.

The bill takes effect July 1, 2026.

## **II. Present Situation:**

### **Autism and Wandering**

Wandering, also referred to as elopement, is a behavior in which an individual leaves the supervision of a caregiver or a safe environment without notice, placing the individual at risk of serious harm. This may include leaving a classroom, home, or supervised community setting and is particularly prevalent among individuals with autism. While brief wandering behavior is common in early childhood, research indicates that elopement may persist or re-emerge among

individuals with autism due to communication challenges, sensory sensitivities, anxiety, or attempts to access preferred environments or avoid distressing stimuli.<sup>1</sup>

Studies have found that nearly half of children with autism are at risk for wandering, and many individuals who elope are unable to reliably communicate identifying information. Wandering incidents pose significant safety risks, including drowning and traffic-related injuries, which are among the leading causes of wandering-related fatalities. These risks increase with the severity of autism and underscore the need for preventive strategies and timely response mechanisms to locate individuals who elope from safe settings.<sup>2</sup>

A number of wearable personal tracking devices are available that help locate individuals at risk of wandering or elopement by using electronic location technology. These devices are typically worn on the wrist or ankle and use radio frequency signals or GPS to locate a missing person. These technologies are used by caregivers and, in some cases, by law enforcement or search-and-rescue programs to locate individuals who have left a safe location.<sup>3</sup>

### **Center for Autism and Related Disabilities**

Each Center for Autism and Related Disabilities (CARD)<sup>4</sup> is one of seven regional centers that provide nonresidential resource and training services statewide for persons of all ages and of all levels of intellectual functioning who have autism, a pervasive developmental disorder not otherwise specified, an autistic-like disability, have a dual sensory impairment, or have a sensory impairment with other handicapping conditions.<sup>5</sup> Each CARD operates independently and coordinates services within a specific region between the state, local agencies, and school districts without duplicating services.

The main functions of each CARD is to:<sup>6</sup>

- Provide information about an individual's disability.
- Refer families to federal, state, or local services.
- Locate support groups.
- Support family planning.
- Provide training sessions on how to work effectively with individuals with ASD and related disabilities.
- Provide consultation to caregivers and professionals related to working with individuals with ASD and related disabilities.

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<sup>1</sup> National Autism Association, *About Autism and Wandering*, <https://nationalautismassociation.org/resources/wandering/> (last visited Jan. 23, 2026).

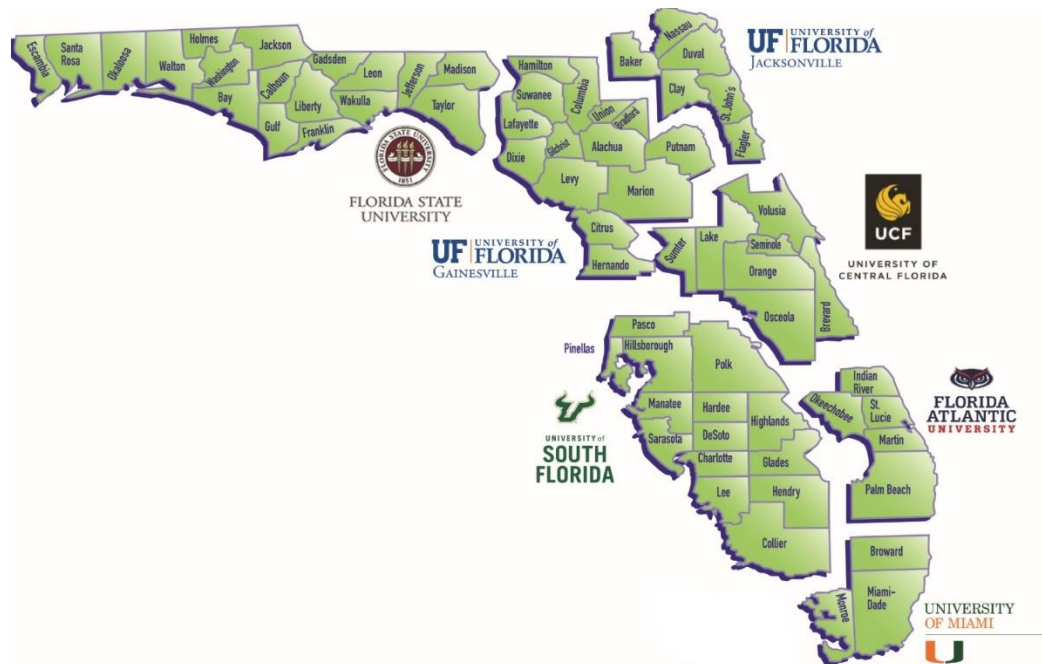
<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

<sup>3</sup> Autism Speaks, *Wandering Prevention*, <https://www.autismspeaks.org/wandering-prevention> (last visited Jan. 23, 2026).

<sup>4</sup> Center for Autism and Related Disabilities, *About Us* <https://www.florida-card.org/aboutUs.htm> (last visited Jan. 23, 2026).

<sup>5</sup> Section 1004.55, F.S.

<sup>6</sup> Center for Autism and Related Disabilities, *About Us*, <https://www.florida-card.org/aboutUs.htm> (last visited Jan. 23, 2026).



The centers are located at Florida Atlantic University, Florida State University, the University of Central Florida, the University of Florida at Gainesville, the University of Florida at Jacksonville, the University of Miami, and the University of South Florida.<sup>7</sup>

### Project Leo

In 2016, the Legislature created three “Project Leo” pilot projects, which provided personal devices to aid in search-and-rescue efforts for persons with special needs in cases of elopement. The first pilot project was developed by the CARD at the University of Florida and served Alachua, Baker, Columbia, Hamilton, and Suwannee Counties. The second pilot project was developed by the CARD at Florida Atlantic University and served Palm Beach County. The third pilot project was developed by the CARD at the University of South Florida and served Hillsborough County.<sup>8</sup>

Participants for each pilot were selected based on criteria developed by the respective CARD, including consideration of the individual’s risk of elopement. Participation was voluntary and free. The centers provided personal devices to county sheriff’s offices for distribution, and the centers were responsible for funding any monitoring costs. Each center was also required to submit preliminary and final reports describing implementation, participant information, elopement outcomes, and recommendations for the future. Funding for the pilots was provided by the centers through their existing resources, and the statutory authority for the pilot projects included a scheduled expiration date of June 30, 2018.<sup>9</sup>

In 2018, the Legislature amended the statute to expand Project Leo to a statewide project available through all centers. Any CARD that opted to join the statewide project could

<sup>7</sup> Center for Autism and Related Disabilities, *CARD Sites*, <https://www.florida-card.org/map.htm> (last visited Jan. 23, 2026).

<sup>8</sup> Ch. 2016-186, Laws of Fla.

<sup>9</sup> *Id.*



participate in providing personal devices for search-and-rescue efforts. The selection criteria remained focused on an individual's risk of elopement and were to be developed by each participating center based on the needs of its service area. The device distribution mechanics were also amended to provide devices to county sheriffs' offices for distribution in conjunction with the centers and to establish that centers would continue to fund monitoring costs. The expanded statewide project continued to operate within available funding and each center's existing resources; however, the statute retained an expiration provision that set a sunset date of June 30, 2019.<sup>10</sup>

### **III. Effect of Proposed Changes:**

SB 1570 revives and amends s. 937.041, F.S., relating to the Missing Persons with Special Needs Statewide Project, which was repealed in 2019. The bill creates the Missing Persons with Special Needs Statewide Project ("Project Leo") through selected centers for autism and related disabilities, which are responsible for administering the project within their respective service areas.

The bill requires each participating Center for Autism and Related Disabilities (CARD or center) to develop criteria for selecting individuals for participation in the project, which must account for an individual's risk of elopement, be implemented on a first-come, first-served basis to the extent funding is available, and ensure that participation is voluntary and provided at no cost to the participant.

The bill requires each participating CARD to provide personal search-and-rescue devices to the sheriff's offices of participating counties. The bill requires county sheriffs' offices to distribute the devices to project participants in coordination with the respective CARD. The participating CARD is also required to fund any costs associated with monitoring the devices.

Additionally, the bill appropriates \$1 million in nonrecurring General Revenue funds for the 2026-2027 fiscal year, allocating \$250,000 each to the University of Florida, Florida Atlantic University, University of South Florida, and Florida State University centers, to be used solely for the purchase of personal search-and-rescue devices.

The bill removes obsolete expiration language from statute.

The bill takes effect July 1, 2026.

### **IV. Constitutional Issues:**

#### **A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:**

None.

#### **B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:**

None.

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<sup>10</sup> Ch. 2018-54, Laws of Fla.

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:

This bill provides a nonrecurring appropriation of \$1,000,000, allocating \$250,000 in nonrecurring funds to each Center for Autism and Related Disabilities (CARD) at the University of Florida, Florida Atlantic University, the University of South Florida, and Florida State University.

**VI. Technical Deficiencies:**

None.

**VII. Related Issues:**

None.

**VIII. Statutes Affected:**

The bill revives, readopts, and amends section 937.041 of the Florida Statutes.

The bill creates an undesignated section of Florida Law.

**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.

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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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By Senator Gaetz

1-01335A-26

20261570\_\_

A bill to be entitled

An act relating to a statewide project for missing persons with special needs; reviving, readopting, and amending s. 937.041, F.S., relating to the missing persons with special needs statewide project; providing that the project is created through the centers for autism and related disabilities; requiring that participants for the project be selected based on certain criteria; deleting obsolete language; providing appropriations; providing an effective date.

Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:

Section 1. Notwithstanding the repeal of section 937.041, Florida Statutes, in section 13 of chapter 2020-3, Laws of Florida, section 937.041, Florida Statutes, is revived, readopted, and amended to read:

937.041 Missing persons with special needs statewide project.—

(1) There is created a statewide project, to be known as "Project Leo," through the centers ~~a center~~ for autism and related disabilities established under s. 1004.55. Each center that opts to join the project shall distribute personal devices to aid search-and-rescue efforts for persons with special needs in the case of elopement.

(2) Participants for the project shall be selected based on criteria developed by the respective center for autism and related disabilities based on the specific needs of the respective ~~each~~ center's service area counties prescribed under

Page 1 of 3

**CODING:** Words ~~stricken~~ are deletions; words underlined are additions.

1-01335A-26

20261570\_\_

s. 1004.55. Criteria for participation in the project must include, at a minimum, the person's risk of elopement. The qualifying participants shall be selected on a first-come, first-served basis by the respective centers to the extent of available funding within their existing resources. The project must be voluntary and free of charge to participants.

(3) Under the project, personal devices to aid search-and-rescue efforts shall be provided by the respective center to the sheriff's offices of the participating counties. The devices shall be distributed to project participants by the county sheriff's offices in conjunction with the respective center. The respective center shall fund any costs associated with monitoring the devices.

(4) The project shall operate to the extent of available funding within the respective center's existing resources.

~~(5) This section expires June 30, 2019.~~

Section 2. For the 2026-2027 fiscal year, the sum of \$250,000 in nonrecurring funds is appropriated from the General Revenue Fund to the Center for Autism and Related Disabilities at the University of Florida, the sum of \$250,000 in nonrecurring funds is appropriated from the General Revenue Fund to the Center for Autism and Related Disabilities at Florida Atlantic University, the sum of \$250,000 in nonrecurring funds is appropriated from the General Revenue Fund to the Center for Autism and Related Disabilities at the University of South Florida, and the sum of \$250,000 in nonrecurring funds is appropriated from the General Revenue Fund to the Center for Autism and Related Disabilities at Florida State University. The funds provided to each center shall be used solely for the

Page 2 of 3

**CODING:** Words ~~stricken~~ are deletions; words underlined are additions.

1-01335A-26

20261570

59 purchase of personal devices to aid search-and-rescue efforts  
60 for persons with special needs in the case of elopement.  
61 Section 3. This act shall take effect July 1, 2026.

# CourtSmart Tag Report

**Room:** SB 301  
**Caption:** Senate Education Postsecondary Committee

**Case No.:**

**Type:**  
**Judge:**

**Started:** 1/28/2026 10:32:01 AM

**Ends:** 1/28/2026 10:43:05 AM

**Length:** 00:11:04

10:32:04 AM Order  
10:32:07 AM Roll call  
10:32:19 AM Chair Calatayud  
10:32:34 AM Tab 1: SB 1376  
10:32:39 AM Chair Calatayud recognizes Sen Burgess to explain the bill  
10:32:45 AM Sen Burgess  
10:33:52 AM Chair Calatayud recognizes Sen Burgess to explain am. 478534  
10:33:58 AM Sen Burgess  
10:34:49 AM Chair Calatayud acknowledges waives speaking  
10:34:58 AM Debate:  
10:35:02 AM Sen Harrell  
10:35:31 AM Sen Berman  
10:36:08 AM Chair Calatayud recognizes Sen Burgess to close on the bill  
10:36:10 AM Sen Burgess  
10:36:48 AM Roll call  
10:36:57 AM Chair Calatayud reports on SB 1376  
10:37:08 AM Recess  
10:37:10 AM Recording Paused  
10:39:12 AM Recording Resumed  
10:39:16 AM Reconvene  
10:39:21 AM Tab 2: SB 1570  
10:39:28 AM Chair Calatayud recognizes Sen Gaetz to explain the bill  
10:39:31 AM Sen Gaetz  
10:40:26 AM Debate:  
10:40:28 AM Sen Berman  
10:41:32 AM Sen Harrell  
10:42:23 AM Chair Calatayud recognizes Sen Gaetz to close on the bill  
10:42:26 AM Sen Gaetz  
10:42:29 AM Roll call  
10:42:42 AM Chair Calatayud reports on SB 1570  
10:43:00 AM Adjournment



## THE FLORIDA SENATE

Tallahassee, Florida 32399-1100

### COMMITTEES:

Environment and Natural Resources, *Chair*  
Appropriations Committee on Agriculture, Environment,  
and General Government  
Appropriations Committee on Health and  
Human Services  
Education Postsecondary  
Fiscal Policy  
Governmental Oversight and Accountability  
Rules

### SELECT COMMITTEE:

Joint Select Committee on Collective Bargaining

### JOINT COMMITTEE:

Joint Committee on Public Counsel Oversight

**SENATOR ANA MARIA RODRIGUEZ**

40th District

January 28, 2026

Senator Alexis Calatayud, Chair  
Senate Committee on Education Postsecondary  
404 South Monroe Street  
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1100

Chair Calatayud,

Please excuse my absence from the meeting of the Senate Committee on Education Postsecondary this morning. I am in another committee presenting a bill.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ana Maria Rodriguez".

Senator Ana Maria Rodriguez  
Florida Senate, District 40

Cc: Matthew Bouck, Staff Director  
Alexander Brick, Deputy Staff Director  
Secret Williams, Committee Administrative Assistant

### REPLY TO:

- ☐ Miami-Dade College, West Campus Suite 1112, 3800 NW 115th Avenue, Doral, Florida 33178 (305) 470-2552
- ☐ 410 Senate Building, 404 South Monroe Street, Tallahassee, Florida 32399-1100 (850) 487-5040

Senate's Website: [www.flsenate.gov](http://www.flsenate.gov)

**BEN ALBRITTON**  
President of the Senate

**JASON BRODEUR**  
President Pro Tempore