

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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**SENATOR SMITH PASSES GROUNDBREAKING WATER SAFETY BILL IN FLORIDA SENATE**

SB 658 advance drowning prevention efforts; create consistent regulations of 'residential' rental properties

**Tallahassee, FL** – On Thursday, February 19th, the full Florida Senate unanimously passed [CS/SB 658](#) affirming its commitment to tackle our state's epidemic of fatal child drownings. The bipartisan legislation introduced by **Senator Carlos Guillermo Smith** (D-Orlando) and **Senator Danny Burgess** (R-Zephyrhills) raises water safety standards for all 'residential' rental properties in the state.

SB 658 requires all long-term and short-term 'residential' vacation rental properties with either a swimming pool on the premises or a water body within 150 feet be equipped with at least one water or pool safety feature (i.e. exit alarm, self-closing/latching doors, pool cover, pool fence, or pool floatation alarm) as defined in [515.27\(1\)](#).

Senator Carlos Guillermo Smith offered the following statement:

*"This week, the Florida Senate took a significant step forward in the effort to prevent fatal child drownings in our state. 100% of drownings are preventable and the solutions are right in front of us through multiple proposals this session— stronger education and awareness, expanded access to child swim lessons, and consistent water safety standards that protect families no matter where they live or visit. This crisis is something lawmakers have the power and responsibility to confront and I'm proud to help lead this effort in the Florida Senate."*

Senator Danny Burgess made the following statement on the Senate floor:

*"First, I wanna thank Senator [Jennifer ] Bradley...for getting so creative with [staff] to learn how you can actually merge two bills together...This has been a great opportunity to work with Senator Smith on an issue that is near and dear to all our hearts. I'm glad that [he] took the lead on this...I will be [his] wingman on a pool bill any day of the week."*

Casey McGovern, Executive Director of [Every Child a Swimmer](#), offered the following statement:

*"I am incredibly grateful to Senator Carlos Guillermo Smith for his leadership and unwavering commitment to protecting Florida's children. The unanimous support of SB 658 on the Senate floor reflects a powerful, shared dedication among Florida's leaders to prioritize drowning prevention and ensure families receive critical water safety information. As someone who has devoted my life to this mission, I am deeply thankful to all who helped move this lifesaving legislation forward for the children and families of our state."*

Chesley Richardson, Executive Director of [Prevent Child Abuse Florida Ounce of Prevention Fund of Florida](#), offered the following statement of support:

*"Vacations should create memories, not tragedies. This bill strengthens water safety with tools that help keep families safe while enjoying Florida's waters. Prevent Child Abuse Florida and the Ounce of Prevention Fund of Florida support SB 658."*

[The Autism Society of Greater Orlando](#) offered the following statement of support:

*“The Autism Society of Greater Orlando extends its deepest gratitude to Senator Carlos Guillermo Smith for his leadership in championing and securing passage of SB 658 & 608 – Water Safety Requirements for the Rental of Residential and Vacation Properties. This life-saving legislation adds critical protections for people with disabilities, particularly individuals with autism, for whom drowning remains the leading cause of injury-related death. Children with autism are also 160 times more likely to drown than their neurotypical peers, largely due to a high risk of wandering and eloping. We also thank Senator Danny Burgess for his bipartisan partnership in helping bring this important bill to the Senate floor. Together, their work will help prevent tragedies and save lives across Florida.”*

Stacey Hoaglund, President of [Disability Advocacy and Support Specialist](#) offered the following statement of support:

*“In 2025, 78% of the children who died in lakes and ponds in Florida were children with autism. This is particularly shocking in that children with autism only represent 2% of the total child population in the state of Florida, but yet our children drown at an alarming rate. This is in great part due to their high tendency to wander, be poor judges of dangerous situations and don't have the same access to swimming lessons as typically developing children do. ALL children deserve to be safe and enjoy their time in the water with family and friends. Through water safety legislation, Senate Bill 658/House Bill 79, Water Safety Requirements for the Rental of Residential and Vacation Properties we can have a direct impact on the wellbeing of children from all walks of life.”*

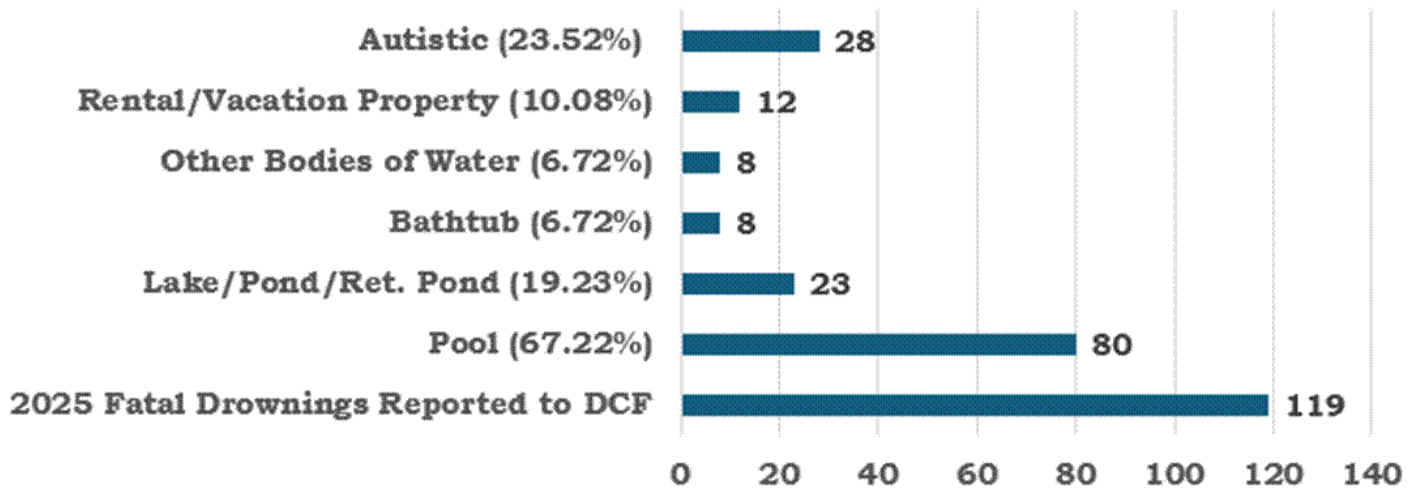
This session, Senator Smith Guillermo Smith has introduced and co-introduced a multi-bill package tackling drowning prevention. [SB 606](#) strengthening postpartum water-safety education has already passed all relevant Senate committees unanimously and [SB 428](#) sponsored by Senator Clay Yarborough and co-introduced by Senator Smith expands access to Florida's child swim lesson voucher program, and is also eligible for a full vote in the Florida Senate. SB 658 now heads to the Florida House for consideration.

Year after year [Florida leads the nation](#) in the number of fatal child drownings and shattered its previous record with 119 fatal drownings in 2025, according to data provided by DCF. Florida also has the highest child drowning rate in the nation [according to FDOH](#) for ages 1-4 and ages 0-9 in a recent multi-year period.

Watch Senator Smith pass SB 658 on the floor on [YouTube](#).

## Florida Fatal Drownings Reported to DCF (119) - 2025 (As of 1/5/26)

(\*Pool 80 + Lake 23 + Bathtub 8 + Other Water 8 = 119. Autism & Rental Property numbers are a part of the 119)



\*Data in chart provided by Florida Department of Children and Families via email - [Fatal Data Drowning and Prevention website](#)

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