

# FLORIDA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

## BILL ANALYSIS

*This bill analysis was prepared by nonpartisan committee staff and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.*

**BILL #:** [HB 711](#)

**TITLE:** Spectrum Alert

**SPONSOR(S):** Borrero, Campbell

**COMPANION BILL:** [SB 500](#) (Avila)

**LINKED BILLS:** None

**RELATED BILLS:** None

### Committee References

[Government Operations](#)

16 Y, 0 N



[Health & Human Services](#)

24 Y, 0 N



[Budget](#)

27 Y, 0 N



[State Affairs](#)

## SUMMARY

### Effect of the Bill:

The bill establishes the Spectrum Alert system, a statewide system to help locate missing children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). The Florida Department of Law Enforcement, in collaboration with other state agencies and local law enforcement agencies, are required to develop the alert system, implement specialized training for officers, and create public awareness initiatives. The bill mandates immediate and widespread dissemination of information when an ASD child goes missing and enhances emergency response efforts.

### Fiscal or Economic Impact:

The bill may have an indeterminate fiscal impact on state and local governments due to the costs of developing and implementing the Spectrum Alert system, associated staff training, and necessary technological updates. Any such impacts can be absorbed within existing resources.

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## ANALYSIS

### EFFECT OF THE BILL:

#### Spectrum Alert System

The bill mandates that the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE)—in cooperation with the Department of Transportation (DOT), the Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles (DHSMV), the Department of the Lottery (Florida Lottery), and local law enforcement agencies— to establish the Spectrum Alert system to alert the public concerning missing children with [Autism Spectrum Disorder \(ASD\)](#). The Spectrum Alert system must be integrated with existing [statewide emergency alert systems](#) to ensure immediate and effective community and emergency response when a child with ASD is missing. The bill acknowledges that children with ASD are prone to elopement (i.e., wandering away from safe locations) and thereby face a unique safety risk; drowning, for instance, is the leading cause of death among the ASD population and Florida ranks fifth in the nation for ASD-related drownings. (Section [1](#))

The bill requires FDLE and its partner agencies to develop a training program for law enforcement officers, which focuses on crisis intervention techniques that improve their ability to understand ASD and other mental illnesses, de-escalate interactions, facilitate appropriate interventions, and respond effectively to missing child emergencies involving ASD. Additionally, the bill requires those state agencies to establish policies and procedures to:

- Improve response efforts, including immediate and widespread dissemination of information when an ASD child is reported missing.
- Enhance emergency response teams' competence by educating them on ASD-specific behaviors and needs.
- Increase public awareness to foster community support for missing ASD children. (Section [1](#))

Law enforcement agencies will be required under the bill to undertake certain actions upon receiving a report of a missing child with ASD, including immediately notifying local media outlets, informing all on-duty officers, and communicating the report to law enforcement in neighboring counties. (Section [1](#))

**STORAGE NAME:** h0711e.BUC

**DATE:** 4/8/2025

The effective date of the bill is July 1, 2025. (Section [2](#))

#### **RULEMAKING:**

The bill grants FDLE rulemaking authority to implement and administer the Spectrum Alert system.

***Lawmaking is a legislative power; however, the Legislature may delegate a portion of such power to executive branch agencies to create rules that have the force of law. To exercise this delegated power, an agency must have a grant of rulemaking authority and a law to implement.***

#### **FISCAL OR ECONOMIC IMPACT:**

##### **STATE GOVERNMENT:**

The bill may have an indeterminate, but likely insignificant fiscal impact on state expenditures due to the costs of developing and administering the Spectrum Alert system, associated training, and public awareness campaigns. FDLE estimates that making necessary technical changes to online systems will cost \$13,000, which can be absorbed within existing resources.<sup>1</sup> Any minor workload impacts for cooperating agencies can also be absorbed within existing resources.

##### **LOCAL GOVERNMENT:**

The bill may have an indeterminate negative fiscal impact on local governments to the extent local law enforcement agencies may be required to develop policies, train staff, and update any necessary technology or infrastructure to implement the Spectrum Alert system. Any such costs can likely be absorbed within existing resources.

### **RELEVANT INFORMATION**

#### **SUBJECT OVERVIEW:**

##### **[Autism Spectrum Disorder](#)**

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a developmental condition characterized by challenges in social interaction, communication, and behavior.<sup>2</sup> According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), approximately 1 in 36 children in the U.S. is diagnosed with ASD.<sup>3</sup> One of the most pressing public safety concerns for children with ASD is elopement, or wandering away from safe environments. Studies indicate that nearly half of children with ASD will attempt to wander or run away at some point, often placing them in life-threatening situations.<sup>4</sup>

Drowning is among the leading causes of death for children with ASD,<sup>5</sup> with Florida posing increased risks due to its numerous bodies of water.<sup>6</sup> Many children with ASD have a diminished awareness of danger, making them more susceptible to accidents involving traffic, bodies of water, or strangers. Traditional search-and-rescue methods present challenges due to the children's nonverbal communication difficulties, sensory sensitivities, and resistance to verbal commands.<sup>7</sup>

##### **[Statewide Emergency Alert Systems](#)**

Florida currently has multiple statewide emergency alert systems, including the Amber Alert, used for abducted children;<sup>8</sup> the Silver Alert, used for missing older adults with cognitive impairments such as dementia or

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<sup>1</sup> FDLE, Agency Analysis of 2025 House Bill 711 (Mar. 3, 2025), p. 4-5.

<sup>2</sup> See Autism Speaks, [Autism Spectrum Disorder \(ASD\)](#) (last visited Apr. 2, 2025).

<sup>3</sup> CDC, [Autism Spectrum Disorder \(ASD\)](#) (last visited Apr. 2, 2025).

<sup>4</sup> CDC, [Occurrence and Family Impact of Elopement in Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders](#) (last visited Apr. 2, 2025).

<sup>5</sup> Children with ASD are 160 times more likely to die from drowning compared to their peers in the general pediatric population. National Autism Association, [Autism and Safety Data](#) (last visited Apr. 2, 2025).

<sup>6</sup> Children's Services Council, [The rise in drownings of children with autism in Florida](#) (last visited Apr. 2, 2025).

<sup>7</sup> National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, [Autism & Wandering](#) (last visited Apr. 2, 2025).

<sup>8</sup> See [s. 937.021, F.S.](#) This statute also addresses cases involving missing adults.

Alzheimer's;<sup>9</sup> the Purple Alert, used for missing adults with mental, cognitive, intellectual, or developmental disabilities not related to Alzheimer's;<sup>10</sup> and the Blue Alert, used for law enforcement officers injured or killed in the line of duty.<sup>11</sup> However, no existing alert system specifically addresses children with ASD who go missing due to wandering behaviors.

### Missing Person Investigations

Every state, county, and municipal law enforcement agency in Florida is required to submit information concerning missing endangered persons<sup>12</sup> to the Florida Department of Law Enforcement's (FDLE's) Missing Endangered Person Information Clearinghouse (MEPIC).<sup>13</sup> MEPIC serves as the central repository for missing endangered persons' information.<sup>14</sup> Upon receiving a report, MEPIC coordinates the dissemination of relevant details through appropriate channels to aid in locating the missing person.<sup>15</sup>

A law enforcement agency receiving a report of a missing child must inform all on-duty officers of the report, communicate the report to every other law enforcement agency having jurisdiction in the county where the child was last seen, and transmit the report for inclusion within the Florida Crime Information Center (FCIC),<sup>16</sup> the National Crime Information Center (NCIC),<sup>17</sup> and the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs)<sup>18</sup> databases within two hours. Similarly, a law enforcement agency receiving a report of a missing adult must transmit the report for inclusion within the FCIC, NCIC, and NamUs databases within two hours.<sup>19</sup>

In addition to FDLE and local law enforcement agencies, several state agencies coordinate efforts to broadcast alerts and disseminate critical information to the public when a person goes missing, including:

- The Department of Transportation (DOT): When an alert is issued, DOT displays information about the missing individual, including vehicle details if available, on digital highway signs to reach motorists in relevant areas.<sup>20</sup>
- The Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles (DHSMV): Assists by utilizing its driver's license and motor vehicle registration databases to help identify missing persons. Additionally, DHSMV collaborates with law enforcement to rapidly distribute missing person alerts to the public.<sup>21</sup>
- The Department of the Lottery: Contributes to the alert system by broadcasting missing person alerts on lottery terminals across the state, including those located in gas stations, supermarkets, and convenience stores.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> See ch. [937, F.S.](#); see also Florida Department of Law Enforcement, [Florida Silver Alert](#) (last visited Apr. 2, 2025).

<sup>10</sup> S. [937.0205, F.S.](#)

<sup>11</sup> S. [784.071, F.S.](#)

<sup>12</sup> "Missing endangered person" means a child, a missing adult younger than 26, a missing adult older than 26 that is suspected of being a victim of criminal activity, and a missing adult who meets the criteria for Silver Alert or Purple Alert. S. [937.0201\(5\), F.S.](#)

<sup>13</sup> S. [937.022\(3\)\(b\)1., F.S.](#)

<sup>14</sup> S. [937.022\(1\), F.S.](#)

<sup>15</sup> See FDLE Missing Endangered Persons Information Clearinghouse, [About Us](#) (last visited Apr. 2, 2025).

<sup>16</sup> The FCIC is a statewide system that provides law enforcement agencies with real-time access to various criminal justice information. See U.S. Department of Justice Office of Justice Programs, [Florida Crime Information Center](#) (last visited Apr. 2, 2025).

<sup>17</sup> The NCIC is a centralized criminal justice database operated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) that provides law enforcement agencies across the U.S. with real-time access to critical criminal justice information. See FBI, [PIA: National Crime Information Center \(NCIC\)](#) (last visited Apr. 2, 2025).

<sup>18</sup> NamUs is a national database designed to help law enforcement, medical examiners, coroners, and the public track and solve cases of missing, unidentified, and unclaimed persons. See NamUs, [What is NamUs?](#) (last visited Apr. 2, 2025).

<sup>19</sup> S. [937.021\(4\), F.S.](#)

<sup>20</sup> See DOT, [Amber Alert](#) (last visited Apr. 2, 2025); s. [937.0205\(3\) and \(6\)\(a\), F.S.](#)

<sup>21</sup> See Driver and Vehicle Information Database (DAVID), [General Operations](#) (last visited Apr. 2, 2025); DHSMV, [Sign up for AMBER, Silver, Purple and Blue Alerts](#) (last visited Apr. 2, 2025); s. [937.0205\(3\) and \(6\)\(a\), F.S.](#)

<sup>22</sup> S. [937.0205\(3\) and \(6\)\(b\), F.S.](#)

RECENT LEGISLATION:

YEAR	BILL #	HOUSE SPONSOR(S)	SENATE SPONSOR	OTHER INFORMATION
2024	<a href="#">HB 937</a>	Casello, Keen	Berman	The bill became law on July 1, 2024.
2023	<a href="#">CS/SB 1332</a>	Stark	Martin	The bill became law on July 1, 2023.
2021	<a href="#">CS/CS/SB 184</a>	Casello, Willhite	Berman	The bill had multiple effective dates and became effective, in part, on July 1, 2021, and July 1, 2022.

BILL HISTORY

COMMITTEE REFERENCE	ACTION	DATE	STAFF DIRECTOR/ POLICY CHIEF	ANALYSIS PREPARED BY
<a href="#">Government Operations Subcommittee</a>	16 Y, 0 N	3/18/2025	Toliver	Villa
<a href="#">Health &amp; Human Services Committee</a>	24 Y, 0 N	3/31/2025	Calamas	Aderibigbe
<a href="#">Budget Committee</a>	27 Y, 0 N	4/8/2025	Pridgeon	Saag
<a href="#">State Affairs Committee</a>				