

CHAPTER 2025-123

House Bill No. 711

An act relating to the Spectrum Alert; creating s. 937.0401, F.S.; providing legislative findings; requiring the Department of Law Enforcement, in cooperation with the Department of Transportation, the Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles, the Department of the Lottery, and local law enforcement agencies, to establish and implement the Spectrum Alert by a specified date; requiring the department, in cooperation with specified entities, to develop a training program and alert system for missing children with autism spectrum disorder which is compatible with existing alert systems by a certain date; specifying requirements for the training program; requiring the Department of Law Enforcement to establish specified policies and procedures; authorizing the department to adopt rules; providing an appropriation; providing an effective date.

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

Section 1. Section 937.0401, Florida Statutes, is created to read:

937.0401 Spectrum Alert.—

(1) The Legislature finds that autism spectrum disorder (ASD) significantly affects children in this country, creating unique challenges that can lead to critical safety risks, such as elopement or wandering behaviors in children. Children with ASD are prone to wander from safe environments at a higher rate than their non-autistic peers. Elopement frequently results in severe consequences, including fatal traffic accidents and drownings. Notably, drowning is the leading cause of death of children with ASD in this country, with Florida ranking fifth in the nation. The high propensity for elopement and the ineffectiveness of traditional search and response methods necessitate a robust system that will swiftly locate and ensure the safety of missing children with ASD. The Legislature finds that a standardized system is necessary to aid in the search for a missing child with ASD.

(2) By July 1, 2026, the Department of Law Enforcement, in cooperation with the Department of Transportation, the Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles, the Department of the Lottery, and local law enforcement agencies, shall establish and implement the Spectrum Alert to enhance the safety and well-being of children with ASD through immediate and effective community and emergency response.

(3) By July 1, 2026, the Department of Law Enforcement, in cooperation with the Department of Transportation, the Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles, the Department of the Lottery, and local law enforcement agencies, shall:

(a) Develop a training program and alert system for missing children with ASD which is compatible with existing alert systems. The training program must implement crisis intervention team training to equip law enforcement officers with the skills to understand ASD and other mental illnesses, to de-escalate interactions with children in crisis, to facilitate appropriate interventions, and to respond effectively to a reported missing child emergency when the child has ASD.

(b) Establish policies and procedures for responding to a reported missing child emergency when the child has ASD. The policies and procedures must, at a minimum, provide for all of the following:

1. Immediate and widespread dissemination of critical information when a child with ASD is reported missing.

2. Enhancement of emergency response teams' competence by informing them of the unique behaviors and needs of children with ASD.

3. Measures to increase public awareness and understanding of the risks associated with autism-related elopement, to foster community support for children with ASD.

(c) Require a law enforcement agency, at a minimum, to do all of the following upon receiving such a report:

1. Contact media outlets in the affected area or surrounding jurisdictions.

2. Inform all on-duty law enforcement officers of the reported missing child with ASD.

3. Communicate the report to all other law enforcement agencies in the counties surrounding the county in which the report was filed.

(4) The Department of Law Enforcement may adopt rules to implement and administer this section.

Section 2. For the 2025-2026 fiscal year, the sum of \$190,000 in nonrecurring funds is appropriated from the Operating Trust Fund within the Department of Law Enforcement to the Department of Law Enforcement for the purpose of implementing the Spectrum Alert.

Section 3. This act shall take effect July 1, 2025.

Approved by the Governor June 5, 2025.

Filed in Office Secretary of State June 5, 2025.