



CAPITOL UPDATE

March 3, 2025



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Big Changes Ahead are Possible for the Agency for Persons with Disabilities

The Florida legislative session begins on March 4, 2025, and there are at least a dozen bills filed affecting individuals with developmental disabilities. Tuesday, March 4, at 12:00 noon is the deadline for filing bills for introduction.

The biggest bill so far is [SB 1050 Agency for Persons with Disabilities by Bradley](#) and its companion [HB 1103 Agency for Persons with Disabilities by Kincart Jonsson](#).

This bill proposes the transfer of Vocational Rehabilitation, the Federal Rehabilitation Trust Fund, and Blind Services from the Department of Education to the Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD) with the intention of enhancing services for those with disabilities. At first glance, this merger could mean better collaboration for individuals with developmental disabilities who need help with job training and finding a job.

The bill would change Chapter 393 F. S., which is currently exclusive to those with developmental disabilities to "Persons with Disabilities." This change would include individuals with all disabilities in the statute currently dedicated to those with developmental disabilities. This broadening terminology underlines concerns that this will divert attention and resources from programs

specifically designed for those with developmental disabilities such as autism, intellectual disabilities, spina bifida, cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, Prader-Willi syndrome, and Phelan-McDermid syndrome.

There are transfer duties related to the submission of necessary amendments or waivers concerning federal programs to APD and mandates for a transition period between July 1, 2025, and October 1, 2027, that requires a collaborative effort from all related state government units for implementation.

There are orders for the establishment of a transition advisory working group, with designated transition coordinators from both the APD and the Department of Education to ensure a smooth operational transition. There seems to be no mention of individuals with disabilities, stakeholder groups and families having representation on the transition and implementation planning groups.

The bill also allows only trained individuals, certified by APD, to administer needs assessments for certain programs. It also stipulates the creation of a statewide Family Care Council and regional Family Care Councils to aid in providing information and support regarding the services available to individuals with disabilities and their families. The Secretary of APD will now appoint all local Family Care Council members, rather than families having control over appointments. There are concerns that this would limit independent family advocacy and allow APD to control who gets a voice in decision-making.

Finally, both Vocational Rehabilitation and APD are struggling to serve clients. Advocates report that both agencies have long wait times and a shortage of providers. This may not be the best time to merge these agencies together.

There are 34 other states that have combined their developmental disability agency with Vocational Rehabilitation. The Florida Developmental Disabilities Council is still trying to understand the impact this new combination will have on individuals with developmental disabilities in Florida.

Below are bills the Council supports or tracks. Keep in mind that bills usually must pass through three or four committees before getting to the full House or Senate chambers. Once in a chamber, bills are read three times before final passage and then sent to the other chamber for acceptance to end up with one bill to send to the Governor.

When the Governor receives a bill, he can sign it, let it become law without his signature, or veto the bill. The Legislature can overturn a veto the next time they meet by two-thirds vote of both chambers.

Please click on bill links to track a bill's full journey through the legislative process.

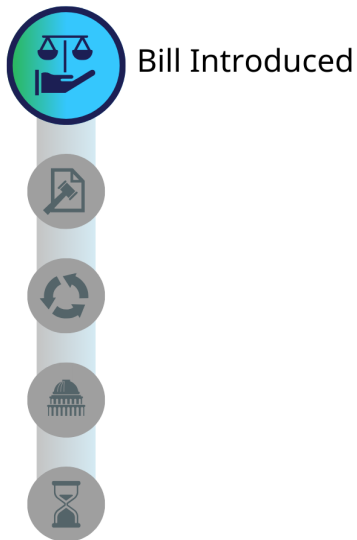
See the FDDC Legislative
Platform

CAPITOL UPDATE: KEY



New for 2025: next to each bill, you will see a graphic that indicates the stage at which the bill is in the legislative process.

Important Bills to Watch



[SB 460-Student Elopement by Arrington](#)

Summary of Original Filed Text - 02/03/25

The bill would create a framework for addressing student elopement in Florida public schools by establishing various requirements for planning and response.

The bill defines "elopement" as the act of a student with disabilities leaving supervision and mandates each public school to set up a School Staff Assistance for Emergencies (SAFE) team and a comprehensive elopement plan.

The bill specifies that the school principal and assistant principal, along with at least five other appointed members, will constitute the SAFE team. This team is responsible for developing, updating, and enacting the elopement plan.

The elopement plan would include detailed procedures for immediate actions following an elopement, a structured search plan including a search grid of critical areas, and a communication strategy among all school personnel, security, and law enforcement.

There is directive language that the elopement plan be submitted annually to the district school board and authorizes the State Board of Education to adopt rules to implement the provisions effectively.

Identical Bill

[HB 0345 Student Elopement by Eskamani](#)

[SB 112-Children with Developmental Disabilities by Harrell](#)

Summary of Original Filed Text - 02/05/25

This bill expands the scope and services of



Initial Committee

healthcare and educational programs for children with developmental disabilities in Florida.

It amends the Cinotti Health Care Screening and Services Grant Program to include autism under eligible services and it creates the Early Steps Extended Option, extending eligibility for existing early intervention services until a child's fourth birthday.

The bill mandates local program offices to prepare for children's transitions out of the Early Steps Program.

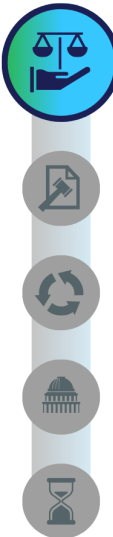
This bill establishes guidelines and funding priorities for startup grants managed by the University of Florida Center for Autism and

Neurodevelopment aimed at supporting schools and summer programs for children with autism.

It directs the Commissioner of Education to review and report on educational curricula for developmental disabilities, enhancing training for professionals with a focus on supporting students with autism.

Identical Bill

[HB 0591 Children with Developmental Disabilities by Maggard](#)



Bill Introduced

[HB 377-Health Insurance Coverage for Individuals with Developmental Disabilities by Tant](#)

Summary of Original Filed Text - 02/04/25

The bill revises definitions related to health insurance coverage for individuals with developmental disabilities, impacting Medicaid options and law enforcement training. It updates the definition of "autism spectrum disorder" to match the most recent edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders by the American Psychiatric Association.

The bill changes the definition of "eligible individual" to expand criteria beyond age restrictions, focusing on the diagnosis of a developmental disability without specifying the age at diagnosis.

The bill reenacts specific statutes to adapt to the updated definitions impacting optional Medicaid services and law enforcement training regarding autism spectrum disorder and retains clauses regarding the adjustment of services based on budgetary constraints and the need for legislative approval for the implementation of new Medicaid services.

Identical Bill

[SB 0756 Health Insurance Coverage for Individuals with Developmental Disabilities by Burton](#)



Bill Introduced



[HB 447 - Disability History and Awareness Instruction by Salzman](#)

Summary of Original Filed Text - 02/06/25

This bill mandates comprehensive disability history and awareness instruction in schools, replacing prior optional guidelines with required educational content.

The bill designates the act as the "Evin B. Hartsell Act." It requires that for a two-week period, students receive intensive instruction on individuals with disabilities, including disability history and the disability rights movement. The instructional content across educational levels includes:

- Grades K-3: Conversations on bullying and activities teaching about physical disabilities.
- Grades 4-6: Provides information and activities related to autism spectrum disorder.
- Grades 7-9: Includes content and activities about hearing impairments.
- Grades 10-12: Focuses on different types of learning and intellectual disabilities, with practical activities to illustrate these conditions.

The bill allows district school boards to collaborate with the Evin B. Hartsell Foundation for curriculum development.

Identical Bill

[SB 0540 Disability History and Awareness Instruction by Collins](#)



Bill Introduced



[HB 413 - Swimming Safety by Gossett-Seidman](#)

Summary of Original Filed Text - 02/05/25

This bill enhances water safety requirements and regulations for children, particularly those with autism, at public swimming areas and prohibits organizations from allowing children access to public bathing places or pools without swimming proficiency verification from a parent or legal guardian.

The bill requires organizations to provide U.S. Coast Guard-approved personal flotation devices (for public bathing places and pools) to children identified as non-swimmers or at-risk and allows organizations to refuse water access to children without the required documentation

and penalizes organizations for non-compliance by allowing disciplinary actions, including administrative penalties.

This bill includes changes to the "Residential Swimming Pool Safety Act," now part of a broader "Swimming Pool and Public Water Safety Act," reinforcing safety barriers and pool standards.

Similar Bill

[SB 0568 Swimming Safety by Rodriguez](#)



Initial Committee

[SB 102 - Exceptional Student Education by Gaetz](#)

Summary of Original Filed Text - 12/17/24

A bill mandates the development and implementation of a workforce credential program for students with autism spectrum disorder by the Department of Education. It mandates the Department of Education to develop and implement a workforce credential program by January 31, 2026, specifically designed for students with autism spectrum disorder to aid in securing employment upon graduation.

Requires the program to allow students to earn badges that demonstrate the acquisition of skills needed by employers, with each badge representing five discrete skills, including workplace safety.

Specifies that the validation of each badge must be done by two members of the instructional staff who specialize in exceptional student education. SB 102 directs the Department of Education to produce an annual report from 2026 through 2030, which includes details on the badges offered, data on post-graduation employment, student participation rates, and other relevant outcome data.

Similar Bill

[HB 0127 Exceptional Student Education by Kendall](#)

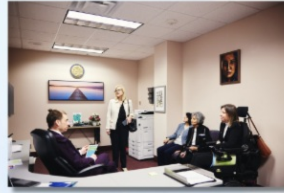


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