

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 1327 TITLE: Community Services for Needy Individuals and Families SPONSOR(S): Gerwig	COMPANION BILL: None LINKED BILLS: HB 1329 Gerwig RELATED BILLS: SB 1144 (Burgess)
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Committee References



SUMMARY

Effect of the Bill:

HB 1327 establishes the Hope Florida Act, creating the Hope Florida Office within the Executive Office of the Governor. It creates a network of support systems comprised of state agencies, nonprofit organizations, faith-based organizations, and private businesses to assist Floridians in need reduce their reliance on government programs and reach self-sufficiency.

Fiscal or Economic Impact:

The bill has a significant negative fiscal impact on the Executive Office of the Governor, to fund the administrative functions of the Hope Florida Office created by the bill.

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ANALYSIS

EFFECT OF THE BILL:

Hope Florida

“Hope Florida – A Pathway to Prosperity” is an initiative launched by First Lady Casey DeSantis in September 2021, and implemented by the Department of Children and Families and other state agencies. Its purposes is to assist individuals reduce or eliminate reliance on government programs and become self-sufficient by focusing on collaboration between the private sector, faith-based communities, non-profit organizations, and government entities.¹ Current law does not authorize Hope Florida or its functions.

The bill creates the “Hope Florida Act,” establishing a general governance structure and mission. (Section [2](#))

Hope Florida Office

The bill creates the Hope Florida Office (Office) within the Executive Office of the Governor (EOG) to coordinate services for needy individuals and families through Hope Navigators and a public-private partnership to help individuals reduce or eliminate their reliance on government programs and become self-sufficient. (Section [3](#))

The bill requires the Office to be led by a director appointed by the Governor, and requires the Office to:

- Establish goals and strategies for Hope Florida;
- Facilitate coordination and collaboration among participating state agencies to achieve the established goals;

¹ Department of Children and Families, Agency Bill Analysis for HB 1327 (2025), pp. 2 (Mar. 14, 2025).

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- Expand the Hope Florida partner network to meet the needs of participants;
- Empower and assist individuals in need to help identify and achieve goals and remove barriers to goal achievement through the development and implementation of care plans in partnership with Hope Navigators;
- Use Hope Navigators to connect participants to community resources and opportunities to reach their goals;
- Use participating state agencies to assist families in reaching self-sufficiency; and
- Refer participants requiring assistance with employment or vocational training to CareerSource Florida and local workforce development boards.

State Agencies

The bill requires state agencies to participate in Hope Florida at the direction of the Executive Office of the Governor. At a minimum, the following state agencies must participate:

- The Department of Children and Families
- The Agency for Persons with Disabilities
- The Department of Juvenile Justice
- The Statewide Guardian ad Litem Office
- The Department of Education
- The Agency for Health Care Administration
- The Department of Corrections
- The Division of Emergency Management
- The Department of Veterans' Affairs
- The Department of Commerce
- The Department of Elderly Affairs (Section [6](#))

The Office must designate a state agency to perform the following functions:

- Operate the Hope Line;
- Develop and maintain a website for individuals to connect with Hope Florida;
- Develop and maintain a Hope Florida case management system; and
- Work with the Department of Commerce and CareerSource Florida to maintain a portal for designating employers as Hope Florida employers. (Section [5](#))

Eligibility

The bill establishes eligibility criteria to access Hope Florida services. An individual in need must:

- Be a legal resident of this state;
- Be a citizen, or a permanent resident alien, of the United States; and
- Be at least 18 years of age, or at least 16 years of age, if emancipated. (Section [5](#))

The bill provides that individuals in need may receive assistance from Hope Florida by calling the Hope Line or accessing the Hope Florida website. (Section [5](#))

Hope Navigators

The bill establishes Hope Navigators as resources serving as a single point of contact for participants. Hope Navigators help participants identify their goals and barriers, provide referrals to local faith-based and community-based partners, and offer one-on-one support in developing personalized care plans to achieve participants' goals and realize their full potential. (Section [6](#)) The bill requires Hope Navigators to include action steps and timelines to address participants' immediate, intermediate, and long-term goals and barriers to assist them in reaching their goals in written care plans. (Section [6](#))

The bill becomes effective upon becoming law. (Section [7](#))

FISCAL OR ECONOMIC IMPACT:

STATE GOVERNMENT:

The bill's requirement to establish the new Hope Florida Office in the Executive Office of the Governor will have a significant negative fiscal impact. The Governor's Budget Recommendation for Fiscal Year 2025-2026 includes four full-time positions and \$536,792 in General Revenue, of which \$21,728 is nonrecurring, to establish the Hope Florida Office.² The House proposed budget for FY 25-26 does not include this funding.

RELEVANT INFORMATION

SUBJECT OVERVIEW:

Direct Support Organizations

Direct-support organizations (DSO) are statutorily created private entities that are generally required to be non-profit organizations and are authorized to carry out specific tasks in support of public entities or public causes. The functions and purpose of a DSO are prescribed by its enacting statute, and, for the most part, by a written contract with the agency the DSO was created to support.

DSO Transparency and Reporting Requirements

Section [20.058, F.S.](#), governs DSO administration. It establishes a comprehensive set of transparency and reporting requirements for DSOs that are created or authorized pursuant to law or executive order and created, approved, or administered by a state agency.³ Specifically, the law requires each DSO to submit the following information related to its organization, mission and finances to the agency it supports on August 1 each year:⁴

- The name, mailing address, telephone number, and website address of the organization;
- The statutory authority or executive order that created the organization;
- A brief description of the mission of, and results obtained by, the organization;
- A brief description of the organization's plans for the next three fiscal years;
- A copy of the organization's code of ethics;
- A copy of the organization's most recent federal Internal Revenue Service (IRS) Return of Organization Exempt from Income Tax form (Form 990);⁵ and
- An attestation, under penalty of perjury, stating that the organization has complied with s. 20.058(4), which requires the organization, when investing funds on behalf of the agency, to make decisions based solely on pecuniary factors and not subordinate the interest of Floridians to other objectives, including sacrificing investment return or undertaking additional investment risk to promote any nonpecuniary factor.

Each agency receiving the above information must make the information available to the public through the agency's website. If the DSO maintains a website, the agency's website must provide a link to the website of the DSO.⁶ Additionally, any contract between an agency and a DSO must be contingent upon the DSO submitting and posting the information.⁷ If the DSO fails to submit the required information for two consecutive years, the agency

² Governor Ron DeSantis, *Focus on Fiscal Responsibility, Fiscal year 2025-2026*,

<http://www.freedomfirstbudget.com/web%20forms/Budget/BudgetJustification.aspx?justID=312647&si=31100100&pc=1602000000&icd=6500200&title=Justification&ver=1> (last visited March 31, 2025).

³ Section 3, ch. 2014-96, L.O.F., codified as [s. 20.058, F.S.](#)

⁴ S. [20.058\(1\), F.S.](#)

⁵ The IRS Form 990 is an annual information return required to be filed with the IRS by most organizations exempt from federal income tax under 26 U.S.C. 501.

⁶ S. [20.058\(2\), F.S.](#)

⁷ S. [20.058\(5\), F.S.](#)

must terminate the contract with the DSO.⁸ The contract must also include a provision for ending operations and returning state-issued funds to the state if the authorizing statute is repealed, the contract is terminated, or the organization is dissolved.⁹

By August 15 of each year, the agency must report to the Governor, the President of the Senate, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, and the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability (OPPAGA) the information provided by the DSO. The report must also include a recommendation by the agency, with supporting rationale, whether to continue, terminate, or modify the agency's association with the DSO.¹⁰

DSO Audit Requirements

Current law requires each DSO created or authorized with annual expenditures in excess of \$100,000 to provide for an annual financial audit of its accounts and records.¹¹ The audit must be completed by an independent certified public accountant in accordance with rules adopted by the Auditor General and the state agency that created, approved, or administers the DSO.¹² The audit report must be submitted within nine months after the end of the fiscal year to the Auditor General and to the agency the DSO supports.¹³

The Auditor General may conduct audits or other engagements of the accounts and records of a DSO pursuant to his or her own authority, or at the direction of the Legislative Auditing Committee.¹⁴ The Auditor General is authorized to require and receive any records from the DSO, or its independent auditor.¹⁵

Hope Florida

Hope Florida, an initiative launched by First Lady Casey DeSantis in September 2021, is intended to assist individuals in reducing or eliminating their reliance on government programs to become self-sufficient.¹⁶ Those served include single parents, individuals with unique abilities, veterans, individuals on government assistance, youth aging out of foster care, seniors, and juvenile justice youth.¹⁷ This is accomplished by financial and employment assistance provided by the private sector, faith-based community and nonprofit organizations, as well as individuals willing to donate funds or their time as volunteers.¹⁸

Hope Florida has a website (www.hopeflorida.com) and a hotline (833-GET-HOPE).¹⁹ The website includes a link to a "CarePortal", an online network that allows Care Navigators to enter a participant's needs, for which registered nonprofit organizations, faith institutions, and private business receive referrals, allowing them to respond and provide assistance.²⁰ It is unclear what eligibility criteria Hope Florida applies when determining what private organizations may register to provide services for people who seek assistance. The website also highlights the Hope Florida Fund as the fund to which businesses may donate financial support.²¹

State Agency Participation

The Hope Florida initiative is operated by the Department of Children and Families (DCF). Several state agencies currently participate in Hope Florida, including the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ), Agency for Persons with

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ S. [20.058\(3\), F.S.](#)

¹¹ S. [215.981\(1\), F.S.](#)

¹² *Id.*

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ S. [11.45\(3\)\(d\), F.S.](#)

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ Hope Florida, *Timeline*, <https://hopeflorida.com/about-us/timeline.html> (last visited Mar. 28, 2025).

¹⁷ Hope Florida, *Who We Serve*, <https://hopeflorida.com/get-help/> (last visited March 28, 2025).

¹⁸ *First Lady Casey DeSantis Announces Major New Initiative*, <https://www.flgov.com/eog/news/press/2021/first-lady-casey-desantis-announces-major-new-initiative> (last visited Mar. 28, 2025).

¹⁹ Hope Florida, *Get Help*, <https://hopeflorida.com/get-help/> (last visited Mar. 28, 2025).

²⁰ Hope Florida, *Give Help*, <https://hopeflorida.com/give-help/> (last visited Mar. 28, 2025).

²¹ Hope Florida, *Businesses*, <https://hopeflorida.com/give-help/businesses.html> (last visited Mar. 28, 2025).

Disabilities (APD), Department of Elder Affairs (DOEA), Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA), the Guardian ad Litem (GAL) program, CareerSource Florida, and the Agency for Health Care Administration (AHCA).²²

DJJ uses Hope Navigators to provide services to:

- Youth involved with DJJ or who are transitioning out of care;
- Parents and families concerned with their child’s behavior; and
- Parents and families of children who have run away, are truant from school, or who are struggling academically.²³

APD utilizes Hope Navigators to connect individuals with unique disabilities with resources that promote independence and integration.²⁴

DOEA uses Hope Florida in two ways:

- Seniors and caregivers can call Hope Florida for assistance; and
- Seniors can volunteer with Hope Florida through the “Hope Heroes Program.” The Hope Heroes Program provides seniors with a path to purpose. Through the program, seniors can mentor young people and individuals with unique abilities.²⁵

DVA utilizes Hope Navigators to help veterans with access to housing, education, VA benefits, substance abuse treatment, etc.²⁶

GAL uses Hope Florida for their foster youths who are transitioning out of foster care by providing them with a mentor who serves as a committed and caring adult.²⁷

CareerSource Florida utilizes Hope Navigators to assist individuals find jobs, enroll in training, and launch new career pathways that lead to self-sufficiency. Hope Navigators have been placed on each of the state’s local workforce development boards.²⁸

AHCA incorporated obligations to participate in and produce data related to Hope Florida in the Medicaid managed care contracts procured under ch. 409.²⁹

According to DCF, an entity called Activate Hope serves as the emergency response component of Hope Florida, deploying after hurricanes to help connect Floridians with food, supplies, and home repairs with assistance from the private sector, nonprofit organizations and state agencies.³⁰ This initiative is a collaboration between the Florida Division of Emergency Management, DCF, and other state agencies.

²² Department of Children and Families, Agency Bill Analysis for HB 1327 (2025), pp. 2 (Mar. 14, 2025).

²³ Department of Juvenile Justice, *Hope Florida*, <https://www.djj.state.fl.us/youth-families/hope-florida> (last visited March 30, 2025).

²⁴ Agency for Persons with Disabilities, *Hope Florida*, <https://apd.myflorida.com/hopeflorida/index.htm> (last visited March 30, 2025).

²⁵ Department of Elder Affairs, *Hope Florida—A Pathway to Purpose*, <https://elderaffairs.org/programs-services/hope-heroes/> (last visited March 30, 2025).

²⁶ Department of Veterans’ Affairs, *Hope Florida*, <https://floridavets.org/resources/hope-florida/> (last visited March 30, 2025).

²⁷ Statewide Guardian ad Litem Office, *Hope Florida*, <https://guardianadlitem.org/hopeflorida/> (last visited March 30, 2025).

²⁸ CareerSource Florida, *First Lady Casey DeSantis Announces Hope Florida to Help Floridians with Barriers to Employment Find Promising Careers*, June 9, 2023, <https://careersourceflorida.com/2023/06/09/first-lady-announces-hope-florida-to-help-floridians-with-barriers-to-employment/> (last visited March 31, 2025).

²⁹ Agency for Health Care Administration, *Statewide Medicaid Managed Care 3.0 Overview*, https://ahca.myflorida.com/content/download/25090/file/Statewide%20Medicaid%20Managed%20Care%20Full%20Deck_09172024.pdf (last visited March 30, 2025).

³⁰ Department of Children and Families, Agency Bill Analysis for HB 1327 (2025), pp. 3 (Mar. 14, 2025).

As of September, 2024, DCF had 125 Hope Navigators.³¹ Initially, DCF repurposed existing full-time positions established for other (legislatively-directed) department functions to serve as Hope Navigators or in other roles.³² In Fiscal Year 2023-2024, the Legislature funded FTEs for various Hope Florida functions:

- DCF Hope Florida Positions: 5.0 FTE and \$324,370 GR
- DOEA “Hope A Pathway to Purpose”: 4.0 FTE and \$431,351 GR
- DVA “Development of Patriot Navigators Program”: 5.0 FTE and 496,966 GR

The number of FTEs in state agencies working on Hope Florida functions, and the extent any preexisting FTEs were repurposed for Hope Florida functions, are unknown. Similarly, the extent to which participating state agencies have entered into contracts for goods or services to further the Hope Florida mission is also unknown.

Hope Florida Foundation DSO

In 2023, the legislature authorized DCF to establish a direct support organization.³³ Section [402.57, F.S.](#), authorizes the DSO to collect and expend funds “to support the department in carrying out its purposes and responsibilities”, and for:

- Addressing gaps in services for the children and adults served by the department;
- Development, implementation, and operation of targeted prevention efforts;
- Services and activities that support the goals of the department;
- The DSO board’s functions, as necessary and approved by the department.

In addition to the general requirements for DSOs in [s. 20.058, F.S.](#), [s. 402.57, F.S.](#), requires the DCF DSO to operate under a written contract with DCF, which must provide for:

- DCF-approved articles of incorporation and bylaws;
- Submission of an annual budget for DCF approval;
- Annual certification by DCF that the DSO is complying with the terms of the contract and operating in a manner that is consistent with DCF’s goals and purposes and is in the best interest of the state, which is to be reported in the official minutes of a meeting of the DSO; and
- The disclosure of material provisions of the contract and the distinction between DCF and the DSO to donors and on all promotional and fundraising publications.³⁴

Section 402.57(1)(c) requires the Secretary of DCF to appoint a board of directors of the DSO according to the DSO’s bylaws.

Section 402.57(1)(f) states that any money may be held in a separate depository account in the DSO’s name and subject to the provisions of DCF’s contract with the DSO. Additionally, s. 402.57(1)(g) requires the DSO to provide an annual financial audit. The DSO must submit the annual audit to the Auditor General pursuant to [s. 215.981\(1\), F.S.](#)

³¹ Department of Children and Families, “Hope Florida: Revolutionizing Government through the Power of Partnership”, presentation at the 2024 Florida Children and Youth Summit, Sept. 5, 2024.

³² In the initial Care Coordination pilot program that preceded Hope Florida, approximately 70 percent of the Care Coordinators were existing DCF employees in 2020; in 2022, under the Hope Florida program, 63 percent of the navigators were existing DFC employees. Department of Children and Families, OPPAGA Information Request Response, June 29, 2022, on file with the House Human Services Subcommittee.

³³ Ch. 2023-310, Laws of Florida.

³⁴ S. [402.57\(1\)\(b\), F.S.](#)

The Hope Florida Foundation³⁵ is the DCF DSO created on August 23, 2023³⁶, pursuant to the authority granted by [s. 402.57, F.S.](#)³⁷

The Hope Florida Foundation's Articles of Incorporation state that its purpose is "to support DCF in carrying out its purposes and responsibilities. . . . [The] purpose for which the corporation is organized are exclusively charitable and preventing cruelty to children."³⁸ This purpose appears to be more narrow than both the DSO's statutory scope of authority and different than Hope Florida's stated mission to help people reduce reliance on government programs and become self-sufficient.

Compliance with Statutory DSO Requirements

It appears that DCF has not complied with the requirements of [s. 20.058, F.S.](#), to publish specific information about the DSO on its website. The DCF website is missing the following:

- A link to the DSO's website;³⁹
- The DSO's name, mailing address and telephone number;
- The statutory authority or executive order that created the DSO;
- A brief description of the mission of, and results obtained by, the DSO;
- A brief description of the DSO's plans for the next three fiscal years;
- A copy of the DSO's code of ethics;
- A copy of the DSO's most recent federal Internal Revenue Service (IRS) Return of Organization Exempt from Income Tax form (Form 990);⁴⁰ and
- An attestation, under penalty of perjury, stating that the DSO has complied with s. 20.058(4), which requires the DSO, when investing funds on behalf of DCF, to make decision based solely on pecuniary factors and not subordinate the interest of Floridians to other objectives, including sacrificing investment return or undertaking additional investment risk to promote any nonpecuniary factor.⁴¹

It appears that DCF has not reported the information provided by its DSO, and DCF's recommendation whether to continue, terminate, or modify its association with the DSO, to the Speaker of the House of Representatives and OPPAGA, as required by s. 20.058(3).⁴²

Additionally, DCF has not complied with ss. 215.981(1) and [402.57\(1\)\(g\), F.S.](#), by submitting the DSO's annual audit to the Auditor General.⁴³ With a June 30, 2024 fiscal year-end, the DSO's audit report was due to the Auditor

³⁵ The Foundation appears to administer the Hope Florida Fund for its donation revenue. *Hope Florida Donate*, <https://hopeflorida.com/donate.html>; *Hope Florida Foundation Donations*, <https://fl.accessgov.com/florida-hopefoundationdonation/Forms/Page/florida-hopefoundationdonation/064cf429-3783-4fee-a896-eadd2db5dec0/a83b548e-b24a-4654-a2cc-ad859d100173/0> (last visited Mar. 28, 2025).

³⁶ See Articles of Incorporation for The Hope Florida Foundation, Inc. filed August 25, 2023, <https://search.sunbiz.org/Inquiry/CorporationSearch/SearchResultDetail?inquiryType=EntityName&directionType=Initial&searchNameOrder=HOPEFLORIDAFUNDATION%20N230000102380&aggregateId=domnp-n23000010238-9dd91ad8-90de-40b5-963f-e087bd75f82b&searchTerm=the%20hope%20florida%20foundation&listNameOrder=HOPEFLORIDAFUNDATION%20N230000102380> (last visited Mar. 28, 2025).

³⁷ *Hope Florida Donate*, <https://hopeflorida.com/donate.html>; *Hope Florida Foundation Donations*, <https://fl.accessgov.com/florida-hopefoundationdonation/Forms/Page/florida-hopefoundationdonation/064cf429-3783-4fee-a896-eadd2db5dec0/a83b548e-b24a-4654-a2cc-ad859d100173/0> (last visited Mar. 28, 2025).

³⁸ *Id.*

³⁹ The DSO (The Hope Florida Foundation) does not appear to have a website.

⁴⁰ The IRS Form 990 is an annual information return required to be filed with the IRS by most organizations exempt from federal income tax under 26 U.S.C. 501. An IRS Form 990 for the DSO cannot be located on the IRS' Tax Exempt Organization Search page or elsewhere online. See IRS, *Tax Exempt Organization Search*, <https://apps.irs.gov/app/eos/>; see also ProPublica, *Nonprofit Explorer*, <https://projects.propublica.org/nonprofits/> (last visited March 30, 2025).

⁴¹ See Florida Department of Children and Families, *Hope Florida A Pathway to Prosperity*, <https://www.myflfamilies.com/hopeflorida> (last visited March 28, 2025).

⁴² See Office of Program Policy and Analysis and Government Accountability, *Reports Submitted to OPPAGA*, <https://oppaga.fl.gov/ReportsSubmittedtoOppaga>; Florida Fiscal Portal, *Citizen Support and Direct-Support Organization Report*, <https://oppaga.fl.gov/ReportsSubmittedtoOppaga> (last visited March 29, 2025).

⁴³ Florida Auditor General, *State Agency Direct-Support and Citizen-Support Organizations*, https://flauditor.gov/pages/npfp_efiles_sa.html (last visited March 31, 2025).

General by March 31, 2025. On April 1, 2025, the Auditor General confirmed that it had not received the report.⁴⁴ Thus, the DSO’s revenues and expenditures since its creation in 2023 are unknown.

House staff requested DCF provide all statutorily-required documents for the purpose of this analysis, but DCF did not provide them.⁴⁵ DCF did provide a list of five DSO board members and a document titled “Executed Hope Florida Foundation Bylaws”; however, the signature page is missing, so it is unclear whether the bylaws were adopted.⁴⁶

BILL HISTORY

COMMITTEE REFERENCE	ACTION	DATE	STAFF DIRECTOR/ POLICY CHIEF	ANALYSIS PREPARED BY
Human Services Subcommittee	17 Y, 0 N	4/1/2025	Mitz	Mitz
Budget Committee				
Health & Human Services Committee				

⁴⁴ Email correspondence from Rick Voss, Office of the Auditor General, April 1, 2025, on file with the House Human Services Subcommittee.

⁴⁵ Email correspondence with DCF February 26, March 4, March 5, March 6, March 9, and March 17, 2025, on file with the House Human Services Subcommittee. House staff also requested data supporting public statements made regarding Hope Florida outcomes, but DCF was unable to provide this. See, email from Sam Kerce, DCF Deputy Chief of Staff, March 17, 2025, on file with the House Human Services Subcommittee.

⁴⁶ Email from Sam Kerce, DCF Deputy Chief of Staff, March 4, 2024, on file with the House Human Services Subcommittee. Follow-up requests to obtain an executed copy were unsuccessful.