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THE PHOENIX FLYER

Bill aims to help Floridians with autism secure work

BY: JAY WAAGMEESTER - FEBRUARY 18, 2025 3:58 PM



📷 Florida's Old Capitol and New Capitol, viewed from the Leon County Courthouse on March 21, 2022. (Photo by Michael Moline/Florida Phoenix)

The Senate Committee on Education PreK-12 gave unanimous support Tuesday to a bill aiming to secure work opportunities for people with autism during its first of three committee stops.

Sen. Don Gaetz, a Republican representing Escambia, Santa Rosa, and part of Okaloosa counties, is the Senate sponsor of [SB 102](#), which would establish credentials for employers to verify students' capabilities.

The program focuses on verifying a student has demonstrated how to be safe in the workplace.



📷 Screenshot via the Florida Channel of Northwest Florida GOP state Sen. Don Gaetz at Ethics and Elections Committee meeting on Jan. 14, 2024.

“Persons with autism are on time, they have a great work ethic, and they can perform work requirements proficiently, especially repetitive skills,” Gaetz said Tuesday. “There’s a place for employees with

autism in the workforce in productive jobs, but a major stumbling block is safety.”

The bill requires badges, which would be verified by special education staff, to document five skills, one of which must be workplace safety. It tasks the Florida Department of Education with developing the program.

Gaetz said consequences from Occupational Safety and Health Administration safety standard violations can be a “major disincentive” for businesses to hire individuals with autism.

According to a study by [Personnel Review](#), people with autism face lower rates of hiring and higher rates of termination driven by employers fearing perceived barriers to making accommodations and fear of low productivity and high turnover.

Amy Wetherby, director of the Florida State University Autism Institute, told the committee the bill is a “really, really important as a step” in employing more people with autism.

“I think one of the most important things in the life of a person with autism is to get a job. It improves their outcome as adults. The best outcomes are associated with employment in terms of mental health outcomes,

in terms of wellbeing and in terms of quality of life,” Wetherby said.

Fewer than 10% of people with autism have jobs that match their skill level and earn a competitive salary, she added.

The bill will be heard next by the Senate Pre-K-12 appropriations committee and then the Fiscal Policy committee.

The measure is one of a raft of initiatives focused on Floridians with autism, such as [SB 112](#), a sweeping proposal introduced by Sen. Gayle Harrell and backed by Senate President Ben Albritton that would expand grant programs for autism services.



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