**** CASE NUMBER: 502026CA012883XXXAMB Div: AH ****
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IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE FIFTEENTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT
IN AND FOR PALM BEACH COUNTY, FLORIDA

Case No.: _____

FATHER DOE and MOTHER DOE,
individually and as parents and natural guardians
of JANE DOE, a minor,

Plaintiffs,

v.

BOCA SCHOOL FOR AUTISM, INC.,
a Florida not-for-profit corporation,
TARA A. GOLDBERG, individually,
DIANA SIERRA, individually,
and JOHN/JANE DOES 1-10,

Defendants.

_____/

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COMPLAINT FOR DAMAGES

Plaintiffs, FATHER DOE and MOTHER DOE, individually and as parents and natural guardians of JANE DOE, a minor, by and through undersigned counsel, sue Defendants, BOCA SCHOOL FOR AUTISM, INC., TARA A. GOLDBERG, DIANA SIERRA, and JOHN/JANE DOES 1-10, and allege as follows:

JURISDICTION AND VENUE

1. This is an action for damages in excess of Fifty Thousand Dollars ($50,000.00), exclusive of interest, costs, and attorneys' fees.

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2. This Court has subject matter jurisdiction pursuant to Article V, Section 5 of the Florida Constitution and Section 26.012, Florida Statutes.

3. Venue is proper in Palm Beach County, Florida, pursuant to Section 47.011, Florida Statutes, because the acts and omissions giving rise to this action occurred in Palm Beach County, Florida, and Defendant BOCA SCHOOL FOR AUTISM, INC. maintains its principal place of business at 3848 FAU Boulevard, Suite 100, Boca Raton, Palm Beach County, Florida 33431.

PARTIES

4. Plaintiff FATHER DOE is the natural father and legal guardian of JANE DOE, a minor, and is sui juris. Plaintiff MOTHER DOE is the natural mother and legal guardian of JANE DOE and is sui juris. FATHER DOE and MOTHER DOE reside in Palm Beach County, Florida.

5. Plaintiff JANE DOE is a minor child, approximately eleven (10) years of age, who has been diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). JANE DOE proceeds by and through her parents and natural guardians, FATHER DOE and MOTHER DOE. JANE DOE proceeds by pseudonym because this case involves facts of the utmost intimacy regarding the severe emotional trauma, isolation, and psychological injury inflicted upon her as a minor with special needs at the Boca School for Autism, and she fears further psychological injury, stigma, and harm if her true identity is publicly disclosed.

6. Defendant BOCA SCHOOL FOR AUTISM, INC. ("BSA" or the "School") is a Florida not-for-profit corporation with its principal place of business located at 3848 FAU Boulevard, Suite 100, Boca Raton, Palm Beach County, Florida 33431. BSA operates educational and summer camp programs purporting to specialize in serving children with autism spectrum disorder and related developmental differences.

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7. Defendant TARA A. GOLDBERG is an individual who, at all relevant times, served as Chief Operating Officer, Director of Operations and Advancement of BSA, and was actively involved in the administration, supervision, and operation of the STEAM+ Summer Camp program. GOLDBERG was personally involved in handling JANE DOE's situation at the camp, including on June 17 and June 18, 2025; she was present at the School on June 18, 2025, and was significantly involved with JANE DOE that day. Upon information and belief, she resides in Palm Beach County, Florida, and is sui juris.

8. Defendant DIANA SIERRA is an individual who, at all relevant times, served as Executive Director of BSA and was responsible for the overall management, policies, and supervision of staff at the School. Upon information and belief, she resides in Palm Beach County, Florida, and is sui juris.

9. Defendants JOHN/JANE DOES 1-10 are individuals whose true names are presently unknown to Plaintiffs, including but not limited to staff members, interventionists, teachers, and supervisors who participated in, directed, or failed to prevent the wrongful isolation and mistreatment of JANE DOE. Plaintiffs will amend this Complaint to allege their true names when ascertained.

10. Non-party Melody Gambrel was, at all relevant times, a behavioral interventionist employed by BSA and was the BSA staff member principally dealing with JANE DOE in the video recording of June 17, 2025, described below. Non-party Jennifer Costelloe was, at all relevant times, BSA's office manager. At all relevant times, each acted within the course and scope of her employment with BSA.

GENERAL ALLEGATIONS

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11. JANE DOE was born on or about August 7, 2015, and was nine years old during the events giving rise to this action. She was diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder on or about January 29, 2020, by Edwin Liu, M.D., a neurologist. She has associated sensory sensitivities, including sound sensitivity, difficulties with emotional regulation, and a history of self-injurious behaviors when dysregulated.

12. Prior to attending BSA's summer camp, JANE DOE had made significant developmental, behavioral, and educational progress through years of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) therapy, speech therapy, occupational therapy, and support from Registered Behavior Technicians (RBTs). She had an Individualized Education Program (IEP) in place since approximately 2021.

13. In or about May–June 2025, Plaintiffs enrolled JANE DOE in BSA's STEAM+ Summer Camp Program for Session 1 (June 9–27, 2025). Plaintiffs paid registration, intake, and program fees, including approximately $1,800.00 to $2,100.00 for the session under a 3:1 student-to-staff ratio, plus additional registration and intake fees totaling several hundred dollars. Plaintiffs entered into a Summer Camp Agreement dated on or about June 4, 2025.

14. Prior to and at the time of enrollment, BSA held itself out as a specialized program for children with autism and other learning and behavioral differences. BSA represented that its staff were trained, caring, and capable of providing appropriate supervision, behavioral support, and a positive experience for children with ASD, and that its staff knew how to handle the kinds of behavioral situations that children with ASD, such as JANE DOE, may present. BSA's materials and communications emphasized a high-quality program with appropriate ratios and the ability to implement behavior modification as needed, including the potential for 1:1 support.

15. Plaintiffs specifically disclosed JANE DOE's diagnosis, sensory sensitivities, emotional regulation challenges, potential for self-injury when dysregulated, and other relevant behavioral

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information on the camp application and related forms. Plaintiffs reasonably relied on BSA's representations that the School specialized in serving children with autism and could appropriately handle behavioral needs.

16. JANE DOE began attending the summer camp on or about June 9, 2025.

17. On or about June 17, 2025, and June 18, 2025, BSA staff, including but not limited to interventionists and supervisors under the direction and control of Defendants GOLDBERG and SIERRA, engaged in improper and harmful practices with respect to JANE DOE, including separating her from her peers and leaving her alone in a room while staff remained outside.

18. Specifically, on or about June 17, 2025, BSA's behavioral interventionist, Ms. Gambrel, brought JANE DOE into a small room (referred to as a "quiet room" or similar) that contained only a minimal number of toys. Right in front of JANE DOE, Ms. Gambrel removed everything in the room except a chair, carrying the items outside, and JANE DOE was left alone in the emptied room. JANE DOE was visibly nervous and distressed.

19. Left alone, JANE DOE did a good job of calming herself, and her distress substantially subsided. Later in the recording, JANE DOE, now calmer, tried to talk with Ms. Gambrel through the partially open door, asking her about something she saw on the ceiling.

20. Rather than acknowledging JANE DOE's success in calming herself and responding to her appropriate attempt to communicate, Ms. Gambrel repeatedly indicated that she did not understand what JANE DOE was talking about. That exchange brought JANE DOE right back into distress, now worse than at the beginning of the recording. Ms. Gambrel then told JANE DOE that she was now closing the door. JANE DOE threw herself onto the floor and began rolling on the floor in a state of complete distress.

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21. Under accepted principles of Applied Behavior Analysis, a child who has calmed herself and is attempting to communicate appropriately should be met with understanding and positive reinforcement, such as praise for self-regulating, so that the calm and appropriate behavior is strengthened and the child is reassured that she has done well. Instead, the response of BSA's behavioral interventionist undid JANE DOE's progress and returned her to a dysregulated state that was worse than when the episode began.

22. Video recordings of these events depict JANE DOE in a state of extreme distress: she can be seen nervously pacing, scripting, pleading for help, crying, screaming, and engaging in self-injurious behaviors such as biting herself. She repeatedly begged staff not to leave her alone and sought intervention.

23. Rather than providing appropriate de-escalation, pairing, or positive behavioral support consistent with accepted ABA principles and the needs of a child with ASD, staff ignored her calm communications once she self-regulated, failed to reinforce appropriate behavior, and, as described above, drove her back into a dysregulated state. Staff admitted understaffing and that the program was "just a summer camp."

24. Upon information and belief, because BSA did not have enough staff, non-clinical administrative personnel were used to manage JANE DOE's episodes of distress. In one of the video recordings, BSA's office manager, Ms. Costelloe, is recorded speaking to JANE DOE in a very stern and reprimanding tone, an approach that could accomplish nothing other than further agitating a distressed child with ASD. Handling a child in distress was not an office manager's role, and it was not the level of staffing BSA had promised.

25. On or about June 17, 2025, Defendant GOLDBERG came out to Plaintiff MOTHER DOE, who was waiting in her car during pick-up, and reported that JANE DOE's behaviors had increased

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"tremendously" and "dramatically," and that additional behavioral support would be needed. Staff further indicated limitations on what they would or could do.

26. Later that same day, MOTHER DOE and Plaintiffs' therapist spoke with Defendant GOLDBERG and Ms. Gambrel. During that conversation, GOLDBERG informed them that, by that point, JANE DOE was spending more time in that separate room than participating in camp activities. Ms. Gambrel's focus, as she expressed it, was on having someone else present with JANE DOE, rather than on learning how BSA could better support JANE DOE.

27. On or about June 18, 2025, JANE DOE was again left alone in a room, this time a larger room containing many toys. JANE DOE did not calm down there. Plaintiffs' therapist, a Registered Behavior Technician ("RBT") who has worked with JANE DOE, observed JANE DOE alone in the room, tense, pacing, and scripting, while staff watched from outside the room. JANE DOE remained alone in the room the entire time and pleaded for help for approximately three minutes. No BSA staff member entered the room to help her; the person who finally stepped into the room to assist JANE DOE was Plaintiffs' own therapist. All of this is captured on video. That same day, BSA requested that Plaintiffs pick JANE DOE up early, and BSA effectively terminated her participation in the camp after less than two weeks of attendance.

28. Upon returning home on June 18, 2025, JANE DOE experienced severe and unprecedented panic attacks and dysregulated states that Plaintiffs had never previously observed. These included: shivering and shaking; facial flushing/redness; dilated pupils; screaming; biting herself and objects; throwing items; breaking a television; and requiring physical restraint and removal of all objects from her room for safety. She experienced multiple such severe episodes that same day, each taking a prolonged period to de-escalate.

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29. The trauma inflicted by the isolation and mistreatment at BSA caused lasting harm. JANE DOE developed new and intensified fears, including an inability to enter a room alone; increased self-injurious and other challenging behaviors; educational regression (declining from performing at a level consistent with prior progress to functioning at a significantly lower grade level); and ongoing emotional distress that persisted for months. Plaintiffs were unable to enroll her in alternative summer programming due to her fragile state, resulting in lost therapeutic and educational opportunities over the summer.

30. A subsequent trauma-informed BCBA/psychologist who evaluated JANE DOE recognized trauma-based behaviors directly attributable to the events at BSA and documented the severe impact.

31. BSA failed to timely or adequately inform Plaintiffs of the problems JANE DOE was experiencing or the methods being used. Plaintiffs subsequently met face-to-face with BSA at a meeting that BSA had set as an orientation for the upcoming school year, and Defendant SIERRA, BSA's Executive Director, was there to conduct that orientation. When Plaintiffs explained that they were there to discuss what had happened to JANE DOE, SIERRA, who had not been present at the School on June 18, 2025, contacted Defendant GOLDBERG, who had been present and involved with JANE DOE that day. When confronted at that meeting, BSA staff admitted they typically "handle everything themselves" without notifying parents and acknowledged the isolation practices. They further admitted understaffing.

32. BSA also took an extended period of time to provide Plaintiffs with video recordings of JANE DOE, and, upon information and belief, the recordings it ultimately provided are incomplete. Upon information and belief, BSA has more than a dozen cameras at its facility, yet it has not provided footage from its other cameras, including hallway footage, showing where

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JANE DOE was and how staff treated her as she was moved between locations, so that Plaintiffs still do not know what occurred outside the recorded rooms.

33. BSA's conduct was inconsistent with its representations of specialized expertise in autism, its stated ratios and support capabilities, and accepted standards of care for children with ASD, including principles of pairing, positive reinforcement of calm and appropriate behavior, prompt and supportive intervention when a child is in distress, and avoidance of punitive isolation that can exacerbate trauma in neurodivergent children.

34. As a direct and proximate result of Defendants' acts and omissions, JANE DOE has suffered severe emotional distress, psychological trauma, developmental and educational regression, physical manifestations of distress, loss of enjoyment of life, and other damages. Plaintiffs FATHER DOE and MOTHER DOE have suffered emotional distress from observing their child's severe suffering, incurred out-of-pocket expenses, lost time from work/business, and continue to incur costs for additional therapies and supports necessitated by the harm caused by Defendants.

35. At all relevant times, the staff members who interacted with and isolated JANE DOE were employees, agents, or apparent agents of BSA acting within the course and scope of their employment or agency. BSA is therefore vicariously liable for their tortious conduct under the doctrine of respondeat superior.

36. Defendants GOLDBERG and SIERRA, as supervisory personnel with authority over camp operations and staff, are liable for their own negligent hiring, training, supervision, and retention of staff, as well as for directing or ratifying the improper isolation practices. In addition, Defendant GOLDBERG personally participated in handling JANE DOE's situation, was present and significantly involved with JANE DOE on June 18, 2025, and knew by June 17, 2025, that JANE

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DOE was spending more time alone in a separate room than participating in camp activities, yet JANE DOE was again left alone in a room the following day.

COUNT I
INTENTIONAL INFLICTION OF EMOTIONAL DISTRESS
(Against All Defendants)

37. Plaintiffs reallege and incorporate by reference paragraphs 1 through 36 as if fully set forth herein.

38. Defendants, through their employees, agents, and themselves, engaged in extreme and outrageous conduct by isolating a young child with autism spectrum disorder alone in a room; emptying a room of its contents in front of her; responding to her successful self-regulation in a manner that drove her back into acute distress; leaving her alone while she pleaded, cried, and self-injured; and observing her distress without timely or appropriate intervention. Such conduct toward a vulnerable, neurodivergent minor goes beyond all bounds of decency and is intolerable in a civilized community, particularly by a program holding itself out as specialized in autism support.

39. Defendants acted intentionally or with reckless disregard of the high probability that their conduct would cause severe emotional distress to JANE DOE, given their knowledge of her diagnosis, sensory needs, and behavioral profile.

40. As a direct and proximate result, JANE DOE suffered severe emotional distress, including but not limited to panic attacks, trauma responses, intensified self-injury, new phobias, educational regression, and lasting psychological harm. Plaintiffs FATHER DOE and MOTHER DOE also suffered severe emotional distress from witnessing and learning of their daughter's suffering.

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41. Defendants' conduct was willful, wanton, and in reckless disregard of Plaintiffs' rights, entitling Plaintiffs to punitive damages.

WHEREFORE, Plaintiffs demand judgment against Defendants for compensatory damages, punitive damages, costs, and such other and further relief as this Court deems just and proper.

COUNT II
NEGLIGENT INFLICTION OF EMOTIONAL DISTRESS
(Against All Defendants)

42. Plaintiffs reallege and incorporate by reference paragraphs 1 through 36 as if fully set forth herein.

43. Defendants owed a duty of reasonable care to JANE DOE as a student/camper entrusted to their care, particularly given her known special needs and vulnerabilities as a child with ASD.

44. Defendants breached that duty by, inter alia, employing improper isolation practices, failing to provide adequate sensory supports and trained behavioral intervention, responding to JANE DOE's self-regulation in a manner that returned her to a dysregulated state, using non-clinical administrative personnel to manage her distress, failing to timely notify parents of emerging problems, understaffing the program, and otherwise failing to exercise reasonable care in the supervision and treatment of JANE DOE.

45. As a direct and proximate result of Defendants' negligence, JANE DOE suffered physical impact and injury (including self-injurious behaviors precipitated by the isolation) as well as severe emotional distress with physical manifestations (panic attacks with physiological symptoms, self-harm, etc.). Plaintiffs FATHER DOE and MOTHER DOE, as close family members who observed

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the aftermath and the child's severe distress, also suffered compensable emotional distress under applicable Florida law recognizing claims in the special relationship/school context and where physical impact or injury is present.

WHEREFORE, Plaintiffs demand judgment against Defendants for compensatory damages, costs, and such other and further relief as this Court deems just and proper.

COUNT III
NEGLIGENCE / NEGLIGENT SUPERVISION AND TRAINING
(Against All Defendants)

46. Plaintiffs reallege and incorporate by reference paragraphs 1 through 36 as if fully set forth herein.

47. Defendants owed JANE DOE a duty to exercise reasonable care in the operation of the summer camp, including the selection, training, supervision, and retention of staff competent to work with children with ASD, and the implementation of appropriate, non-harmful behavioral supports.

48. Defendants breached that duty by failing to adequately train staff in evidence-based practices for autism (including pairing before demands and positive reinforcement), by permitting or directing the use of punitive isolation, by understaffing, by using non-clinical administrative personnel to manage a child's behavioral episodes, by failing to monitor and correct harmful practices, and by failing to communicate timely with parents.

49. As a direct and proximate result, JANE DOE and Plaintiffs FATHER DOE and MOTHER DOE suffered the damages described herein.

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WHEREFORE, Plaintiffs demand judgment against Defendants for compensatory damages, costs, and such other and further relief as this Court deems just and proper.

COUNT IV
VICARIOUS LIABILITY / RESPONDEAT SUPERIOR
(Against Defendant Boca School for Autism, Inc.)

50. Plaintiffs reallege and incorporate by reference paragraphs 1 through 36 as if fully set forth herein.

51. At all relevant times, the staff members, interventionists, and supervisors who isolated, observed, and failed to properly support JANE DOE were employees or agents of BSA acting within the course and scope of their employment or agency.

52. BSA is therefore vicariously liable under the doctrine of respondeat superior for the tortious acts and omissions of its employees and agents as alleged in the foregoing Counts.

WHEREFORE, Plaintiffs demand judgment against Defendant Boca School for Autism, Inc. for compensatory damages, punitive damages (as applicable), costs, and such other and further relief as this Court deems just and proper.

COUNT V
BREACH OF CONTRACT
(Against Defendant Boca School for Autism, Inc.)

53. Plaintiffs reallege and incorporate by reference paragraphs 1 through 36 as if fully set forth herein.

54. Plaintiffs and BSA entered into a valid and binding Summer Camp Agreement and related enrollment contracts under which Plaintiffs paid substantial fees in exchange for BSA's provision

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of a specialized summer program with appropriate staffing ratios, trained staff, and suitable support for a child with ASD.

55. BSA breached the agreement by failing to provide the promised level of care, support, and specialized programming; by employing harmful isolation practices inconsistent with the nature of the program; by understaffing, including failing to provide staffing consistent with the 3:1 student-to-staff ratio for which Plaintiffs contracted and paid, as reflected in BSA's own admission of understaffing; and by effectively terminating JANE DOE's participation after less than two weeks while retaining the fees paid.

56. As a direct and proximate result of BSA's breach, Plaintiffs suffered damages including the loss of the value of the fees paid, additional costs for alternative care and therapies, and consequential damages arising from the harm to JANE DOE.

WHEREFORE, Plaintiffs demand judgment against Defendant Boca School for Autism, Inc. for compensatory damages, costs, and such other and further relief as this Court deems just and proper.

COUNT VI
FALSE IMPRISONMENT
(Against All Defendants)

57. Plaintiffs reallege and incorporate by reference paragraphs 1 through 36 as if fully set forth herein.

58. Defendants, through their employees and agents, intentionally restrained JANE DOE against her will by placing her alone in a room, apart from her peers, and keeping her there while staff remained outside, including, on June 17, 2025, emptying the room of its contents in front of her and then telling her that the door was being closed, and, on June 18, 2025, leaving her alone in

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a room while she pleaded for help. The restraint was without lawful authority or justification under the circumstances, particularly given her age, disability, and the punitive nature of the isolation.

59. JANE DOE was aware of the confinement and suffered harm as a result.

60. As a direct and proximate result, JANE DOE suffered the damages alleged herein.

WHEREFORE, Plaintiffs demand judgment against Defendants for compensatory damages, punitive damages, costs, and such other and further relief as this Court deems just and proper.

COUNT VII
FRAUDULENT / NEGLIGENT MISREPRESENTATION
(Against Defendant Boca School for Autism, Inc. and Supervisory Defendants)

61. Plaintiffs reallege and incorporate by reference paragraphs 1 through 36 as if fully set forth herein.

62. Defendants made material representations that BSA specialized in serving children with autism, employed trained staff capable of handling behavioral needs, knew how to handle the kinds of behavioral situations JANE DOE might present, maintained appropriate ratios, and would provide a safe, supportive environment. These representations were made in promotional materials, the handbook, intake processes, and direct communications.

63. The representations were false or made without reasonable grounds for believing them to be true, as evidenced by the understaffing, lack of proper pairing and positive support, use of harmful isolation, and rapid termination of JANE DOE's enrollment.

64. Defendants intended that Plaintiffs rely on the representations, or Plaintiffs justifiably relied on them in deciding to enroll JANE DOE and pay the fees.

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65. As a direct and proximate result of the misrepresentations and Plaintiffs' reliance thereon, Plaintiffs suffered damages including the fees paid, the trauma and regression suffered by JANE DOE, and consequential losses.

WHEREFORE, Plaintiffs demand judgment against Defendants for compensatory damages, costs, and such other and further relief as this Court deems just and proper.

DEMAND FOR JURY TRIAL

Plaintiffs demand a trial by jury on all issues so triable.

PRAYER FOR RELIEF

WHEREFORE, Plaintiffs respectfully request that this Court:

A. Enter judgment in favor of Plaintiffs and against Defendants, jointly and severally, for compensatory damages in an amount to be determined at trial;

B. Award punitive damages against Defendants as permitted by law;

C. Award Plaintiffs their costs of this action;

D. Grant such other and further relief as the Court deems just and proper.

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Respectfully submitted,

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