



HOUSE MAJORITY OFFICE

FLORIDA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES



REPRESENTATIVE RAY RODRIGUES, MAJORITY LEADER

The Majority Office created the below articles as content for your newsletters. The Majority Office also created the following video that highlights the “Top 5” things that happened in the House throughout the week: <https://youtu.be/iJh1GfyEKA>.

IMPORTANT NOTE: All communications distributed in mass, including in electronic format, require review and approval *prior to* distribution. The articles included below have been preapproved. However, please remember that you still need approval from the Majority Office before distributing an article if you change it or if you include it with other unapproved material. Refer to chapter 4 of the Administrative Policy Manual for more information on the House mass communications policy.

Florida House Issues Formal Apology for Injustice Against Groveland Four

The House passed a bill this week issuing a formal apology for the state’s gross injustices against Charles Greenlee, Walter Irvin, Samuel Shepherd, and Ernest Thomas, who have come to be known as the "Groveland Four." These four men were victims of abhorrent racism after being falsely accused of rape. Their story is one of a complete failure of the justice system that can never happen again. The bill provides for an official apology to them and their families and urges the Governor and Cabinet to perform expedited clemency review of their cases and grant full pardons.

Although no apology will ever be sufficient for the pain these men and their families suffered, by acknowledging the past we can prevent similar injustice from occurring again.

Florida House Issues Formal Apology to the Victims of Arthur G. Dozier School for Boys

This week the Florida House took official legislative action to formally apologize for the horrific mistreatment and abuse that occurred at the Arthur G. Dozier School for Boys in Marianna and the campus in Okeechobee, Florida. The Dozier school was first opened by the State of Florida in 1900 as a reform school for children, many of whom were sentenced to Dozier for minor infractions such as truancy or smoking. Throughout its history, reports of brutal beatings and suspicious deaths plagued the school. Many of the boys were subject to physical and sexual abuse, and a number of them died on the premises. The Okeechobee campus (Okeechobee School) was opened in 1955 and students experienced similar abusive practices. Both the Dozier and Okeechobee schools were closed in 2011, following investigations by the U.S. Department of Justice and the Florida Department of Law Enforcement. More than 500 former students have come forward with reports of physical, mental, and sexual abuse by school staff during the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s.

The Florida House took official legislative action to formally apologize to the victims of the schools and their families, acknowledge the abuses experienced by children, and express our commitment to ensure that children placed in the state's care are protected from abuse and violations of human decency in the future.

The House also passed a bill that implements recommendations by the 2016 Dozier Task Force, which include the creation of two memorials dedicated to the memories of the boys who lived and died at Dozier School and requires the Department of Environmental Protection to continue investigating the



HOUSE MAJORITY OFFICE

FLORIDA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES



REPRESENTATIVE RAY RODRIGUES, MAJORITY LEADER

land of the school to identify further areas with potential burial sites. The bill also names the Department of Law Enforcement's Forensic Training Center in Pasco County after Thomas Varnadoe, one of the victims of the school whose remains were identified by USF after being exhumed as part of its investigation.

This apology was long overdue and I was honored to be a part of it.

Judiciary Committee Sends Condo Reforms to the House Floor

The Judiciary Committee passed HB 1237, which proposes reforms to condominium laws. The bill addresses many of the issues raised in a recent grand jury investigation that found fraud and rampant abuse of power within condo associations.

Some of the many reforms the bill provides include the following: prohibiting an officer, director or manager from accepting a kickback; increasing access to records by requiring condominium associations of 150 or more units to develop a website accessible by unit owners containing most of the association's books and records; providing a means for the state to compel an association to furnish financial reports to a member; removing the ability of a board to refuse to recognize a recall; improving the arbitration process; eliminating conflicts of interests by prohibiting contracts between a condo association and any company related to an officer or director of the association; allowing tenants the right to inspect their association's bylaws and rules; providing for the immediate removal of any officer charged with a crime related to the condominium association; and increasing the protections on a member's right to vote in association elections.

I support the bill and believe these measures are important steps to take in order to help limit the amount of fraud and abuse that has unfortunately plagued our state's condominium industry.

The bill's next stop is the House floor, where it will be under consideration by all members of the House.

Florida House Passes Workers' Compensation Bill

After recent court rulings found parts of Florida's workers' compensation law unconstitutional, the Florida House passed a comprehensive bill to fix the issue. Through the many changes made, the goal of HB 7085 is to ensure the quick and efficient delivery of disability and medical benefits to an injured worker and to facilitate the worker's return to gainful reemployment at a reasonable cost to the employer. The bill is expected to result in significant savings in overall workers' compensation system costs, which will lead to reduced premiums.

I proudly voted for the bill and think it will improve the state's workers' compensation system for all of those involved.

The bill now heads to the Senate for their action.



HOUSE MAJORITY OFFICE

FLORIDA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES



REPRESENTATIVE RAY RODRIGUES, MAJORITY LEADER

Florida House Passes Motor Vehicle Insurance Bill

The Florida House passed HB 1063 this week, which would reform motor vehicle insurance in Florida. The goal of HB 1063 is to increase access to meaningful insurance coverage while bringing personal responsibility and accountability to the system.

Personal Injury Protection (PIP) is also known as Florida Motor Vehicle No-Fault Insurance and requires vehicle owners and drivers to obtain no-fault coverage. PIP along with property damage coverage of \$10,000, are the only insurance coverages required for all Florida drivers at the time of vehicle registration. In addition, the Financial Responsibility Law requires all Florida drivers at fault in an accident to be accountable for bodily injuries or deaths (BI) up to \$10,000 for one person, and \$20,000 for two or more persons. BI coverage may be secured through insurance or other means following an accident.

Legislators revised PIP multiple times in response to rampant fraud. Unfortunately, these efforts have not fixed the problems and Fraud and abuse in the PIP system continue.

HB 1063 would resolve these issues by ending mandatory PIP coverage and replacing it with mandatory BI coverage that must be obtained prior to registering a vehicle. The bill focuses on personal responsibility and does away with the flawed no-fault system. Under the bill, drivers will have to obtain BI coverage that covers, at a minimum, \$25,000 in damages due to bodily injury or death to one person, and \$50,000 for two or more persons. Thirty-eight states have a similar system.

I voted for this good bill because it will bring much needed personal responsibility and accountability to our motor vehicle insurance system and will help decrease premiums for Florida drivers.

The bill has been sent to the Senate for their action.

Committee Passes Assignment of Benefits Reform Bill

The Commerce Committee passed HB 1421, which addresses abuses involving agreements that assign the benefits (AOB) of an insurance policy related to residential property claims.

An AOB is a legal tool that allows a repair person or company to “stand in the shoes” of a property owner to receive the proceeds of an insurance policy. AOBs are commonly used when homeowners experience water damage and contact a repair person for assistance. Unfortunately, insurance companies have recently experienced a higher percentage of lawsuits involving AOBs, which generally result in higher payouts and litigation costs. These higher payouts and litigation costs are ultimately paid for by consumers in the form of higher insurance premiums.

HB 1421 looks to resolve the issues associated with AOBs by establishing provisions that protect consumers and aid in reducing litigation. Some of these provisions include: allowing property owners the ability to rescind the AOB within seven days; requiring the repair person to provide a copy of the AOB to the insurance company within three days; requiring the AOB to include a written itemized cost



HOUSE MAJORITY OFFICE

FLORIDA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES



REPRESENTATIVE RAY RODRIGUES, MAJORITY LEADER

estimate of services; requiring the repair person to give the insurance company at least 10 days' notice before filing suit on a claim; and allowing both the insurance company and the repair person the ability to potentially recover attorney fees if they fail to settle and go to court.

I support this bill because I believe it protects consumers and will help reduce premiums for property owners.

This was the bill's last committee stop. It is now ready to head to the Floor for consideration by all members of the House.

House Votes to Urge Congress to Repeal Obamacare

The federal Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA), commonly referred to as Obamacare, was signed into law on March 23, 2010. Among its sweeping changes to the United States health care system were various new or increased taxes, and reductions to or eliminations of existing tax protections and deductions.

This week, the House passed a bill to urge Congress to fully repeal PPACA and its tax provisions.

Copies of the memorial will be sent to the President of the United States, the Vice President of the United States, the Speaker of the United States House of Representatives, and each member of the Florida delegation to Congress.

Simply put, Obamacare has to go: it has increased health care costs and decreased health care options for far too many Floridians.

The bill has been sent to the Senate for their consideration.

Subcommittee Passes Bill to Update and Improve State's Medicaid Program

The Health Care Appropriations Subcommittee passed HB 7117, which proposes improvements to the Statewide Medicaid Managed Care program (SMMC) to implement lessons learned during the first five years of the program. The bill proposes numerous important changes, but three are worth highlighting.

First, the bill directs the Agency for Health Care Administration (AHCA) to seek federal approval to add eligibility requirements for enrollees in the Managed Medical Assistance (MMA) program. Able-bodied adults must meet the same work requirements as those for temporary cash assistance in the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program. Eligibility and enrollment in the MMA program will be contingent on paying a monthly premium, based on income: those making 50-100% of the federal poverty level will pay \$10; and those making 101% of the federal poverty level and above will pay \$15.

Second, the bill requires AHCA to conduct systematic, ongoing testing of each Medicaid managed care plan's network to make sure it is accurate and providers are accepting new Medicaid patients. This will ensure that Medicaid enrollees have access to care. It will also identify any problem areas, such as



HOUSE MAJORITY OFFICE

FLORIDA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES



REPRESENTATIVE RAY RODRIGUES, MAJORITY LEADER

providers who aren't taking new Medicaid patients or providers with office staff that don't know the practice is part of Medicaid managed care plan network.

Third, the bill removes the requirement that AHCA set the payment rates for nursing homes providing services in the Long-term Care (LTC) program. Instead, the bill requires the LTC managed care plans and nursing homes to negotiate mutually acceptable payment rates, methods, and terms of payment – like most other providers in Medicaid.

If it becomes law, the bill will make our SMMC program more efficient and effective. The bill will now head to the House floor where I intend to provide my full support.

Committee Passes Bill to Responsibly Implement Amendment 2

On November 8, 2016, Florida voters passed Amendment 2 to legalize marijuana for Floridians with debilitating medical conditions. The amendment requires the Department of Health (DOH) to adopt rules for patient and caregiver identification cards, caregiver qualifications, medical marijuana treatment centers (MMTCs) and patient supply limits by July 3, 2017. DOH must begin registering MMTCs and issuing identification cards by October 3, 2017.

The Appropriations Committee passed a bill this week to implement Amendment 2. HB 1397 creates a regulatory framework for licensing MMTCs and marijuana testing labs; growing, processing, testing, transporting and dispensing medical marijuana; registering qualified patients and caregivers; certifying patients for medical use of marijuana; and obtaining medical marijuana by a qualified patient or caregiver.

The bill also provides funds for the Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles to implement a statewide impaired driving education campaign and for the Department of Health to implement a statewide marijuana education and illicit use prevention campaign.

The bill creates a robust regulatory system to meet federal guidance while ensuring patient access and safety. I support HB 1397 because it responsibly implements Amendment 2.

House Passes "Certificate of Need" Reform

On Thursday, the House passed a bill to eliminate the state's "Certificate of Need" (CON) program for hospitals.

The CON program, administered by the Agency for Health Care Administration (AHCA), requires certain health care providers to obtain state approval before entering the market or offering certain new or expanded services. The CON program currently regulates hospices, skilled nursing facilities, intermediate care facilities for the developmentally disabled, hospitals and certain specialized hospital services.

The CON program nearly eliminates competition in the health care market, causing unnecessary and unfair cost increases for consumers. These market-entry barriers prevent or delay innovation, and they



HOUSE MAJORITY OFFICE

FLORIDA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES



REPRESENTATIVE RAY RODRIGUES, MAJORITY LEADER

incentivize competitors to push each other out of the market with lawsuits rather than competing based on quality.

HB 7 removes hospitals and hospital-based services from Florida's CON review program. As a result, any person wishing to build or replace a hospital, or establish specialized services in a hospital, including inpatient complex medical rehabilitation beds, need only go through the AHCA licensure process. If an applicant can meet the licensure statutes and regulations, the applicant will be permitted to offer new or additional hospital facilities or services to patients in the state without first obtaining a CON from AHCA.

The bill reduces costs and increases quality of care, and I was proud to support it on the House floor. Now the bill will go to the Senate for their consideration.

House Passes Bill Encouraging Self-Sufficiency

The House passed an important pro-family bill that makes changes to Florida's Temporary Cash Assistance Program (TCA) and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to encourage families to be self-sufficient: HB 23.

The bill has three important parts to encourage recipients to comply with TCA program requirements. First, the bill requires certain government agencies to work with recipients to make individual plans with clear expectations so that TCA recipients know what they need to do and how to overcome problems. Second, the bill increases sanctions for recipients who fail to meet program requirements. Third, the bill improves workforce programs so individuals on TCA are better able to find work to support their families. Under the bill, at least three regional workforce boards must create workforce programs using new techniques that work well for cash assistance recipients to help them become "work ready".

With respect to SNAP, or food stamps, the bill ends a change to the program made in 2010 during the devastating economic downturn. That change helped more people qualify for food assistance in that tough time. Now, about 3.3 million Floridians – 1 in 6 people - are on SNAP. Fortunately, our economy has improved since then — for example, the state's unemployment rate fell from 11.4% to 5.0%. Under the bill, the state will seek federal approval to reinstate the federal asset limit eliminated during the downturn. The asset limit won't count assets like primary residences, retirement accounts or vehicles used for work (like boats used for a fishing business, or taxis). The asset limit will help ensure that assistance goes to those who are truly in need.

Encouraging families to be self-sufficient is something we can all get behind, and that's exactly what this bill would do. The bill now heads to the Senate.

House Passes Bill to Expand Civics Education

The Florida House passed a bill this week that strengthens civics education in our K-12 public schools and post-secondary institutions.



HOUSE MAJORITY OFFICE

FLORIDA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES



REPRESENTATIVE RAY RODRIGUES, MAJORITY LEADER

The bill proposes three primary changes to law. First, the bill would designate September as “American Founders’ Month,” and encourage all public schools to coordinate instruction related to the nation’s founding fathers during September. Second, the bill would require the *Just Read, Florida! Office* to develop and provide access to sequenced, content-rich curriculum programming, instructional practices, and resources that help elementary students increase their background knowledge and literacy skills. Finally, the bill would require students entering into the Florida College System or State University System in the 2018-2019 schoolyear, or later, to either take a civics course or pass a civic competency test.

If it becomes law, this legislation will help students become civically engaged adults who make positive contributions to their communities.

The bill is now ready to go to the Senate for their consideration.

“Schools of Excellence” Passes House Floor

The Florida House passed a bill that establishes the Schools of Excellence Program.

One function of Florida’s statewide assessments is to identify and recognize schools that perform well based on school quality standards established in law. The system has evolved and increased accountability for schools and educators by using student achievement and learning gains data from statewide standardized assessments. Annually, school grades are given on an A through F scale based on points earned by a school in a number of different categories.

The Schools of Excellence Program rewards schools that consistently score in the top 20% of schools based on their points earned in school grade calculations. Schools are rewarded with increased administrative flexibilities, which are intended to allow high-performing schools freedom to explore additional high-performance strategies.

I support creating this program and believe it would significantly benefit schools throughout the state.

The bill now heads to the Senate for their consideration.

House Passes Educational Options Bill

This week, the Florida House passed HB 15, which will expand and improve the Gardiner Scholarship Program and the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Program.

The Gardiner Scholarship Program provides parents of students with certain disabilities more flexibility to customize their child’s education. The bill would expand eligibility for the Gardiner scholarship by increasing the pool of eligible applicants and expanding the use of funds.

The Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Program offers scholarships to students from families with limited financial resources. The bill would increase the amount of scholarship funds students receive on a grade



HOUSE MAJORITY OFFICE

FLORIDA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES



REPRESENTATIVE RAY RODRIGUES, MAJORITY LEADER

by grade basis and increase the amount of transportation funds for students who attend a public school outside of their district. The bill would also allow parents who are in the armed forces to apply for the scholarship at any time. Currently only students in foster care or out-of-home care have that ability.

I believe we are responsible for ensuring all children have access to a high-quality education. HB 15 helps us fulfill that responsibility by increasing educational choice and opportunity for children that need it the most.

The bill now has to receive approval from the Senate.

Statewide Assessments Bill Advances in House

The Education Committee passed HB 549, which requires the Department of Education (DOE) to publish statewide student assessments on their website and overhauls how schools administer standardized tests in our state.

HB 549 requires that the DOE publish certain statewide assessments administered during the previous school year on their website. The bill provides that only questions—not students' answers—will be published. This will begin in 2020 and continue every three years. The initial release will include, at a minimum, the third grade English language arts and mathematics assessments, the tenth grade English language arts assessments, and the Algebra I end of course assessment.

HB 549 also moves statewide testing to the end of the school year and requires local district assessment results to be provided to teachers within one week of administration. I believe this will give teachers more time to teach and allow teachers, parents, and students a better sense of the student's strengths and weaknesses.

Finally, the bill helps parents be more informed about their child's progress with an easy to understand, user friendly score report. This would empower parents to be more involved with their child's educational needs.

I support the bill because it offers common sense reforms to allow teachers, parents, and students grapple with during springtime testing with more knowledge and less stress.

The bill is now ready to be considered by all members of the House on the House floor.

Committee Votes to Reform Community Redevelopment Agencies

The House Government Accountability Committee passed HB 13 to reform community redevelopment agencies (CRAs). CRAs are created by cities or counties to address slum, blight or affordable housing shortages through redevelopment. The committee found that some CRAs use taxpayer dollars for improper purposes and that all CRAs need better reporting and oversight. The committee also found that cities and counties can already perform the same functions as CRAs.



HOUSE MAJORITY OFFICE

FLORIDA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES



REPRESENTATIVE RAY RODRIGUES, MAJORITY LEADER

HB 13 would fix these problems by increasing transparency and accountability for CRAs. It would require board members to receive ethics training, require the Department of Economic Opportunity to post a list of inactive CRAs online, and require more oversight of each CRA's budget process. In addition, the bill reforms the process for creating new CRAs and would require current CRAs to receive support from a super majority of their governing board to continue.

Any government program that uses taxpayer money should be held to the highest standards. I support this bill because I believe too many CRAs do not live up to such standards.

The bill will now head to the floor to be voted on by all members of the House.

Final Committee Passes Bill to Protect Taxpayer Dollars

On Wednesday, the House Government Accountability Committee passed a bill to protect taxpayer dollars by limiting how government entities can spend those dollars.

The bill limits the amount of money that state agency and judiciary branch employees can be reimbursed for lodging expenses while they are traveling for certain work events. The bill also prohibits the use of state funds for purchasing alcohol, as well as food or beverages, for specified state-sponsored events.

I support this bill because I believe protecting taxpayer dollars is one of the most important objectives of an elected Representative.

The bill has passed all of its committees and is now ready to head to the House floor where it will be voted on by all representatives.

House Passes Conflicts of Interest Bill

The House passed HB 7083, which proposes important ethics reforms related to conflicts of interest. Some of the proposed reforms in the bill include: prohibiting state and local officers or employees from soliciting a conflicting job; requiring disclosure and reporting on offers of conflicting employment; requiring state legislators and statewide elected officers to disclose changes in employment and pay raises immediately when the employer has interests in the legislative process; clarifying regulatory conflict rules; and imposing a two-year ban on agency directors from lobbying any state agency.

Government employees and officers serve the public and should not be able to use their positions for private gain.

The bill will now head to the Senate for consideration.



HOUSE MAJORITY OFFICE

FLORIDA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES



REPRESENTATIVE RAY RODRIGUES, MAJORITY LEADER

House Committee Passes Local Government Fiscal Transparency Bill

This week, the Government Accountability Committee passed a bill that would increase local government fiscal transparency.

HB 7065 focuses on helping citizens gain access to important information so they can be more engaged on important government decisions. Some of the bill's provisions include: improving access to voting records related to local option taxes and debt issuances; enhancing access to tax history and property tax information; expanding public notice requirements; and improving local government reporting requirements for economic development incentives.

I support the bill because Floridians deserve to know how their tax dollars are spent.