



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/D8WO_0z0V5M.

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.

Appropriations Committee Approves House Budget

This week, the Appropriations Committee passed the House’s recommended budget for 2016-2017. Our budget cuts wasteful pork barrel spending while funding our state’s critical needs, including significant investments in education. The House budget also provides \$2.2 billion in tax cuts for parents, students, teachers, veterans, job creators, homeowners, and other Floridians. Finally, the budget responsibly plans for the future by placing a record \$3.6 billion in reserves to prepare for any unforeseen future economic uncertainty.

I believe this budget not only saves taxpayers money by eliminating wasteful spending and cutting taxes, but will secure long term budget surpluses while ensuring our state’s critical needs are met. Next week, all members of the Florida House of Representatives will vote on the budget on the House floor.

Ways & Means Committee Proposes \$2.2 Billion Tax Cut

This week the Ways & Means Committee passed two bills that will put more money back into the pockets of hardworking Floridians.

The committee first passed a proposed constitutional amendment that would protect homeowners by adding \$25,000 to the homestead tax exemption.

The committee then passed a bill to cut taxes for millions of Floridians. Under this tax package, students, parents, veterans, homeowners, job creators, job seekers, farmers, and others will receive a tax cut from the Florida House. The following are some highlights of the tax package I am proud to support:

- Eases the growing cost of higher education with the **College or University Textbook Sales Tax Exemption**.
- Helps make education more affordable with a ten-day **Back-to-School Holiday**.
- Honors the 1.6 million veterans in Florida with the **Veterans’ Sales Tax Holiday**.
- Reduces the **Business Rent Tax** for businesses.
- Protects Florida’s families and homes from natural disasters with the **Disaster Preparedness Sales Tax Holiday**.
- Provides relief to families who currently pay tax on items that are necessities for their young children with the **Diapers and Incontinence Products Sales Tax Exemption**.



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- Provides relief to farmers with the **Agriculture-Related Sales Tax Exemptions**.

I support both bills because they truly put Floridians first.

Education Expert Daisy Christodoulou Speaks to House Members

Daisy Christodoulou is the Head of Assessment at Ark Schools in the UK, where she works on assessment reform, replacements for national curriculum levels, and readiness for new national exams. Previously, she was Research and Development Manager at Ark, working closely on curriculum reform in secondary English.

She's the author of the popular book *Seven Myths about Education*, which offers a thought-provoking critique of educational orthodoxy. Drawing on her recent experience of teaching in challenging schools, she shows through a wide range of examples and case studies just how much classroom practice contradicts basic scientific principles. She examines seven widely-held beliefs which are holding back students and teachers:

- Facts prevent understanding
- Teacher-led instruction is passive
- The 21st century fundamentally changes everything
- You can always just look it up
- We should teach transferable skills
- Projects and activities are the best way to learn
- Teaching knowledge is indoctrination

Ms. Christodoulou recently published her latest book this past February, titled *Making Good Progress? The future of Assessment for Learning*. Read more about Ms. Christodoulou in her profile in The Guardian.

I really enjoyed listening to Ms. Christodoulou and hope the House considers her work when contemplating education policy in our state.

House Subcommittee Passes Bill to Publish Student Assessments Online

The PreK-12 Appropriations Subcommittee passed HB 549, which requires the Department of Education (DOE) to publish statewide student assessments on their website.

Florida's statewide student assessment program is used to measure if students have mastered Florida's academic content standards. Currently, only sample questions of statewide assessments are posted on the DOE website. These sample questions are not taken from actual assessments; they are only meant to show the types of questions asked.

HB 549 requires that the DOE publish certain statewide assessment administered during the previous school year on their website. The bill provides that only questions—not students' answers—will be



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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.

I support this bill because parents should be able to know what are in these tests. Doing so will not only increase transparency and accountability with state assessments, but will also allow parents to be more engaged in their children's education.

"Schools of Hope" Bill Heads to Floor

The House Appropriations Committee passed a bill that would promote improved student performance, increase accountability of failing schools, and establish the Schools of Hope program.

Currently, schools with a 6th, 7th, or 8th grade class must implement an early warning system to identify students who need additional support to improve academic performance. The bill expands the range of schools that must implement an early warning system to schools that serve any student in kindergarten through 8th grade. I believe this expansion will help ensure less children fall behind.

The bill streamlines the school improvement process and increases accountability of persistently low performing schools. Schools will be required to immediately implement intervention and support strategies if the school earns a "D" or "F" and provides school districts increased flexibility to address the needs of those schools. The bill authorizes the establishment of schools of hope to provide students in areas of persistently low-performing schools with a high-quality education option designed to close the opportunity gap and increase student achievement.

I believe too many children are stuck in failing schools for far too long and this bill will prevent that from continuing.

House Committee Votes to Expand Civics Education

The House Education Committee passed a bill this week that would strengthen civics education in our K-12 public schools and post-secondary institutions.

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.



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House Committee Passes “Schools of Excellence”

The House Education Committee 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 the percentage of total 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.

Education Committee Passes Educational Options Bill

The House Education Committee passed HB 15, which looks to 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 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.

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.

Committee Passes Bill to Increase Access to Quality Health Care

The Ways & Means Committee passed HB 7011, which seeks to eliminate unnecessary regulation and authorize and incentivize efficient methods of providing care. The bill’s provisions primarily relate to telehealth and advanced practice nursing.



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Telehealth is the use of telecommunications technologies, like computers or mobile devices, to deliver health-related services and information. Telehealth is currently used throughout the state, but there are several barriers to its use. The bill addresses these barriers in several ways:

- 1) Eliminates confusion over which health care practitioners may provide services using telehealth by expressly authorizing Florida-licensed health care professionals to use telehealth and establishing a standard of care;
- 2) Authorizes out of-state health care professionals to use telehealth for Florida patients if they register with the Department of Health or the applicable board, meet certain requirements, and pay a fee; and
- 3) Incentivizes telehealth by creating a tax credit for health insurers and HMOs that cover services provided by telehealth.

Telehealth can be used to address the current health care provider shortage and give Floridians increased access to the best quality providers.

The bill also expands advanced practice nursing. Current Florida law prevents advanced registered nurse practitioners (ARNPs) from providing care to the greatest extent of their education and training; ARNPs cannot practice without the supervision of a physician. Among other provisions, the bill allows ARNPs who meet certain criteria to practice without physician supervision. These “independent advanced practice registered nurses” (IAPRNs) must register with the Board of Nursing, which may administratively discipline the IAPRNs if they violate Board standards related to unethical and substandard practices.

Allowing highly-trained and experienced ARNPs to care for patients without unnecessary and expensive supervision will reduce health care costs and increase efficiency while maintaining quality.

Committee Passes Bill Encouraging Self-Sufficiency

The Health & Human Services Committee passed an important pro-family bill: HB 581. The bill changes two programs to encourage families to be self-sufficient.

First, the bill ends a change made to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), or food stamps, 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.

Second, the bill creates better workforce programs so individuals on temporary cash assistance can find work to support their families. Some cash assistance recipients have problems that make it difficult for them to obtain and keep jobs. Under the bill, at least three regional workforce boards must create



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workforce programs using new techniques that work well for cash assistance recipients to help them become “work ready”.

Encouraging families to be self-sufficient is something we can all get behind and that’s exactly what this bill would do. The bill preserves SNAP as a safety-net for those most in need while enhancing our workforce system to better serve those with significant barriers to employment.

Committee Passes Bill to Reform Certificate of Need

The Health & Human Services committee passed a bill this week to change the state’s “Certificate of Need” (CON) program.

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 (ICF/DD), hospitals and certain specialized hospital services.

For these service areas, 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 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 health care facilities or services to patients in the state without first obtaining a CON from AHCA.

The bill reduces costs and increases quality of care.

House Votes to Create Uniform Rules for Ridesharing Companies

On Wednesday, the House passed HB 221, which establishes a uniform statewide regulatory framework for ridesharing companies like Uber and Lyft. Currently, ridesharing companies in Florida follow local laws and regulations, which change from city to city. Some cities have even tried to ban ridesharing companies from operating.

HB 221 implements standardized regulations for ridesharing companies, including but not limited to: minimum insurance requirements for drivers and companies; a zero-tolerance policy on drug and alcohol abuse by drivers; extensive background and driving history checks; nondiscrimination and disability access compliance; and requirements to maintain records on riders and drivers.



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Local governments should not keep ridesharing companies from operating successfully in Florida. I was proud to support this legislation. Ridesharing companies are efficient, safe, convenient, and most importantly, provide flexible jobs.

House Committee Votes to Modernize the Florida Retirement System

The Florida Retirement System (FRS) offers government employees two options to save for retirement: the pension plan, a traditional defined benefit plan, or the more modern investment plan, a defined contribution plan. The House Appropriations Committee passed a bill to modernize and improve the system. Some notable provisions in the bill include the following:

First, the bill changes the default from the pension plan to the investment plan for new employees who do not select either plan during the six-month election period after they are hired.

Second, the bill expands survivor benefits for spouses and children of employees who were killed in the line of duty. The benefits for police officers, firefighters, and all other employees would be retroactive to 2002.

Third, the bill prevents newly elected officials initially enrolled in the FRS Elected Officers' Class, on or after July 1, 2018, from participating in the pension plan. They will only have the option to participate in the investment plan.

Finally, the bill allows renewed membership into the investment plan or other optional retirement program for a retiree of the investment plan or other retirement program if they return to employment with an FRS employer.

I believe these reforms will help ensure state employees can select a retirement plan that best fits their particular needs and ensure the spouses and children of state employees who were killed in the line of duty receive all possible benefits.

Committee Votes to Reform Community Redevelopment Agencies

This week, the House Ways and Means 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.

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 would prevent cities and counties from creating new CRAs and require current CRAs to receive support from a super majority of their governing board to continue operating.



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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.

Florida House Passes Gaming Bill

The House passed a bill this week that would authorize the Governor's execution of a new Gaming Compact with the Seminole Tribe of Florida and resolve other issues related to gambling.

The bill will create a new 20 year compact between the State and the Seminole Tribe of Florida. State revenues from the new compact will be used exclusively for education. Specifically, the revenues will be used for recruiting and retaining the best teachers in the K-12 school system, helping under-served students from persistently failing schools, and increasing funding for distinguished faculty in higher education.

The bill also closes loopholes and shuts down card games not authorized by the Legislature, limits gambling to current locations, eliminates inactive and delinquent gambling permits, and prohibits the issuance of new gambling permits. This bill will more effectively restrict gambling in our state to current levels at existing locations, which will protect Florida's national and international brand as a family friendly place to live, work, and visit for many years to come.

I proudly supported this bill because it strikes a reasonable balance between controlling gambling and establishing long-term certainty and predictability for existing gambling entities in our state, while providing much needed funding for education.

House Committee Passes Workers' Compensation Bill

After recent court rulings found parts of Florida's workers' compensation law unconstitutional, the Commerce Committee passed a comprehensive bill on 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.

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

House Committee Passes Conflicts of Interest Bill

On Thursday, the House Government Accountability Committee passed HB 7083, which proposes important ethics reforms related to conflicts of interest. Some of the reforms included: 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.



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

Stand Your Ground Reform Passes the House

This week the House passed SB 128, which reforms the procedure for a Stand Your Ground immunity hearing.

The stand your ground law allows for a pre-trial hearing for anyone who claims that he or she acted in self-defense. The purpose of the law is to support the constitutional right to self-defense and to allow individuals who act in self-defense to avoid the lengthy and costly burden of a full trial.

Unfortunately, courts ruled that the burden of proof during the pre-trial Stand Your Ground hearing is on the person claiming they acted in self-defense. I believe this interpretation of the law has been destructive to its intent; individuals who claim they acted in self-defense under Stand Your Ground now have to essentially put forth the costly and time consuming case the law sought to avoid.

SB 128 follows the intent of the law and puts the burden on the state, not the accused, to prove by clear and convincing evidence the accused did not act in self-defense.