



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/hGWGSn2B9ml>.

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.

Subcommittee Passes “Fewer, Better Tests”

This week the PreK-12 Quality Subcommittee passed HB 733 to overhaul how schools administer standardized tests in our state.

Florida’s current testing season begins at the end of February and ends in mid-May. In my view, the current testing schedule interrupts too many classes and unfairly tests students before they have had a chance to be taught a years’ worth of lessons.

HB 773 fixes this problem by moving testing to the end of the school year, giving teachers more time to teach. It also minimizes disruption to students and school schedules by shortening the testing window from nine weeks to three weeks with the exception of the third grade reading assessment.

Additionally, the bill requires local district assessment results to be provided to teachers within one week of administration. I believe this will help teachers better instruct our children by returning the results of the students’ test scores in a timely manner. This could also reduce the amount of tests that are administered by local school districts.

The bill also ensures that parents will be more informed about their child’s progress with an easy to understand, user friendly score report that will include: a clear explanation of a student’s areas of strength and areas for improvement; specific actions and resources to assist parents; and information comparing the student’s score to all students in the district, state, or other states. This would empower parents to be more involved with their child’s educational needs.

I believe these common sense reforms would reduce the stress and anxiety that teachers, parents, and students grapple with during springtime testing. I support this legislation and will keep you up to date as it moves through the legislative process.

“Schools of Excellence” Passes First Committee Stop

The PreK-12 Quality Subcommittee passed a bill this week that establishes the Schools of Excellence Program.



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One function of Florida's statewide assessments is to identify and recognize schools that perform well based on school quality metrics 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 flexibility, which is intended to relieve such high-performing schools from burdensome state or local regulations.

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

House Subcommittee Passes Bill to Protect Taxpayer Dollars

On Monday, the House Oversight, Transparency & Administration Subcommittee passed a bill to protect taxpayer dollars by limiting how the state 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. Finally, the bill places a limit on the cost per square foot of a new government building.

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

House Committee Passes Legislation to Hold Government Accountable

On Thursday, the House Appropriations Committee passed HB 479, which further increases transparency and accountability in government.

The bill holds government accountable by ensuring state agencies and many other government entities have internal controls in place to curb waste, fraud, and abuse and promote efficiency in their operations. The bill increases transparency by extending the amount of time budget documents for cities and counties must be available online so citizens know how their tax dollars are being spent. Finally, the bill reforms public testimony laws so people will have the opportunity to speak at local board and commission meetings without having to submit their comments in advance.

I support this bill and pledge to continue looking for ways to make government more transparent, efficient, and accountable to taxpayers.



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Public Integrity & Ethics Committee Continues to Pass Strong Ethics Reforms

The House Public Integrity & Ethics Committee passed a bill on Thursday that includes significant reforms for public officers and employees. Some of the reforms include the following: prohibiting public servants from soliciting a conflicting job; reforming registration for executive branch lobbying; and imposing a two-year ban on lobbying any state agency for Department Secretaries and other top appointees in the Executive Branch.

I believe these new reforms will help ensure public servants are held to the highest ethical standards and whatever they do will be done in the sunshine.

Committee Passes Proposed Amendment to Give the House the Authority to Impeach State Attorneys and Public Defenders

This week the Public Integrity & Ethics Committee heard a proposed constitutional amendment that, if passed by the voters, will place on the next general election ballot the expansion of impeachment powers of the Legislature. If passed, this proposal will give the Legislature the ability to impeach state attorneys and public defenders who violate Florida's laws. Currently, only the Governor may suspend these officers for misconduct. Impeachment is the historic method of recalling public officers in our constitutional system.

The Florida House is committed to bringing unprecedented accountability to all levels of government, and this proposal is a strong step toward that goal.

Committee Passes Bill Encouraging Self-Sufficiency

The Appropriations 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 are on SNAP. Fortunately, our economy has improved since then — for example, the state's unemployment rate fell from 11.4% to 4.9%. Under the bill, as of January 1, 2018, the state will revert to the federal minimum eligibility level instead of the outdated state 2010 level.

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



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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.

Free Market Health Care Reforms Ready for House Floor

The Health & Human Services Committee passed four important free market health care reform bills, which all would help increase access to quality and affordable health care for Floridians: HB 145; HB 161; HB 375; and HB 589.

HB 145 expands the use of ambulatory surgical centers (ASCs) and allows recovery care centers (RCCs) in the state. ASCs are non-hospital facilities that provide surgical care. ASCs have highly skilled staff and surgeons and are less expensive and more convenient than having surgery in a hospital. RCCs provide post-surgical and post-diagnostic, short-term medical and nursing care, support, and pain control for patients that do not require hospitalization. RCCs exist in some states, but not Florida.

HB 375 requires all Florida hospitals and ASCs to complete and publish patient culture surveys. A "patient safety culture survey" is a survey which asks employees about patient safety and quality of care. The surveys help hospitals identify and fix problems. If published, the survey data can also help Floridians make decisions about which facilities are best for their own care and that of their families.

HB 589 doubles the number of drugs listed on MyFloridaRx.com, which is Florida's prescription drug pricing website. The website currently includes 150 of the most commonly prescribed brand name drugs and associated generic equivalents and allows patients to compare prices of the drugs by location. Floridians can search the website by county, city, and drug. More information provided to the public through MyFloridaRx.com will allow Floridians to make cost-effective choices for themselves and their families. Ultimately, drug price transparency empowers patients and lowers the costs of drugs by encouraging competition.

HB 161 helps expand the use of direct primary care (DPC) in Florida by preventing DPC agreements from being regulated like insurance. DPC is a medical practice model that eliminates third party payers from the doctor-patient relationship. By contract, a patient or employer pays a monthly fee to the primary care provider for defined services. After paying the fee, a patient can use all services in the agreement at no extra charge. One of the most critical problems in healthcare is out of control and unjustifiable costs. Innovations like DPC cut costs by eliminating the administrative hassles of the third-party payer system.

I support all four bills, which are now ready to be voted on by all Representatives on the House floor.

Insurance & Banking Subcommittee Rolls out Workers' Compensation Bill

After recent court rulings found parts of Florida's workers' compensation law unconstitutional, the Insurance & Banking Subcommittee spent significant time drafting and passing a comprehensive bill on the issue. Through the many changes made, the goal of the bill is to ensure the quick and efficient



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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.

First, the bill addresses issues involving attorney fees by keeping the current attorney fee structure, but allowing for changes in specific circumstances. Currently, the fee structure is percentage based, where attorneys are paid by the insurer a percentage of the amount of money they obtain for their client. However, in some cases, the potential amount of money is too low to fairly compensate an attorney for their time. Courts determined that the fee structure was preventing injured workers from obtaining representation and getting their day in court. In doing so, the courts found that an hourly fee structure was required when the statutory fee structure results in a fee that is too low. To address this outcome, the bill allows for hourly attorney fees only in certain circumstances and it limits the total amount that the insurer may be forced to pay in those circumstances to \$250 per hour.

Second, the bill addresses the rights of injured workers. Under the legislation, injured workers are now able to pay for their own attorney, which was previously prohibited.

Third, the bill addresses temporary wage replacement benefits by increasing temporary wage replacement benefits from 104 weeks to 260 weeks and filling the gap between temporary and permanent wage replacement benefits for certain injured workers. These changes will help injured workers receive uninterrupted benefits when transitioning between temporary and permanent wage replacement benefits.

Fourth, the bill increases opportunities for competition by allowing insurers to decrease premiums by a uniform percentage not to exceed five percent. Giving insurers the opportunity to offer lower premiums creates competition that benefits the consumer, which previously was not an option without burdensome regulatory filings.

Lastly, the bill addresses things that affect costs. For example, the bill would: control incentives for attorney involvement; require the collection of additional data on the cost of attorneys on both sides; and require insurers to authorize or deny medical authorization requests, unless there are incomplete or missing forms or documentation.

I support the solutions provided above as they improve the state's workers' compensation system for all of those involved.