



Palm Beach County Legislative Update

Department of Legislative Affairs

Committee Week 2

Week of October 9, 2023

This week, members of the Florida Senate headed to Tallahassee to attend the chamber's first committee meetings in advance of the 2024 Legislative Session. The Florida House of Representatives held its first committee meetings back in September. For the next few months leading up to the beginning of session on January 9, both the House and the Senate will be holding their committee meetings on concurrent weeks.

There were a total of seven Senate committees that met to hear from agency heads, staff, and others on a variety of topics ranging from property insurance to Medicaid redeterminations. No legislation was considered.

Senate Military and Veterans Affairs, Space and Domestic Security Committee

This committee heard a presentation by Major General James Hartsell, the Executive Director of the Florida Department of Veterans Affairs, regarding services available to Florida's veterans. Colonel Tim MacGregor, Director of the Office of Military and Defense at the Florida Department of Commerce, was also present to update lawmakers for the first time since this Office was established within the Florida Department of Commerce. The Office will assume Enterprise Florida's former military and defense programs and offer a variety of grants to support military families and the protection of military installations in Florida.

Senate Banking and Insurance Committee

In the Banking and Insurance Committee, legislators received a briefing on the status of Florida's property insurance market from Office of Insurance Regulation Commissioner Michael Yaworsky. Tim Cerio, the Executive Director and CEO of Citizens Property Insurance, was also scheduled to present on the topic. The state's top insurance regulator and the CEO of the state-backed residual insurer told senators that while Florida property insurers continue to lose money, they're losing less than before following legislative efforts to curb litigation. They also asserted that more companies are preparing to enter the Florida market. Cerio told the panel that there is now more capacity in the reinsurance market and that some of the policies that Citizens has taken on because homeowners couldn't get coverage anywhere else are now potentially more attractive to the private market. Citizens currently insures 16% of the Florida market. The committee's chair, Senator Jim Boyd, stated that lawmakers made significant policy changes over the last two years on the issue and that they likely will not be pursuing additional legislation this session.

Senate Criminal Justice Committee

The Senate Committee on Criminal Justice discussed the Regina B. Shearn Corrections Transition Program and the impact it has had since being offered in Florida's prisons. This program has been utilized to prepare long-term inmates for re-entering society upon their release and is offered at no cost to the state. Dr. Shearn's program has improved the lives of hundreds of individuals, boasts a 1.7% recidivism rate among paroled participants, and has generated significant cost-savings for Florida taxpayers.

Pre-K – 12 Education Committee

During the Pre-K – 12 Education Committee meeting, Florida Department of Education Deputy Commissioner Juan Copa spoke on recommended performance standards, also known as cut scores, for Florida’s new assessment system. In 2022, SB 1048 was passed and later signed into law by the Governor. This bill replaced the Florida Standards Assessment (FSA) with a progress monitoring system that measures student growth. The new assessment system was put into place in time for the 2022-2023 school year and used a temporary scale to measure performance until there was sufficient time to establish more permanent cut scores. Florida’s Education Commissioner has submitted his recommended cut scores to the legislature for review before the State Board of Education’s consideration and approval of these new standards before the end of the year.

Senate Appropriations Committee on Health and Human Services

The Senate Appropriations Committee on Health and Human Services received an update on Florida’s Medicaid eligibility redetermination process from state officials at the Agency for Health Care Administration, the Department of Children and Families, and the Florida Healthy Kids Corporation. The panel also heard an overview of the implementation of a new law passed earlier this year as HB 121, which expands the income eligibility threshold for programs including Florida KidCare and Florida Healthy Kids from 215% to 300% of the federal poverty level, or \$64,500 to \$90,000 for a family of four.

Senate Appropriations Committee on Criminal and Civil Justice

Florida Department of Corrections (FDOC) Secretary Ricky Dixon addressed the Senate Appropriations Committee on Criminal and Civil Justice to discuss the status of the corrections system and the challenges facing the Department. The Secretary shared three items that must be addressed to fix Florida’s corrections system: staffing challenges, inmate idleness, and aging infrastructure. In recent sessions, the legislature has allocated significant funding to support staff recruitment and retention, including historic pay raises and retention incentives. These efforts have made significant improvements in the reduction of job vacancies, however, some regions are still highly understaffed as FDOC works diligently to fill these positions. Secretary Dixon also praised legislators for their efforts to fund teaching positions and educational opportunities for inmates. While progress is being made concerning staffing and inmate idleness, FDOC institutions are still struggling with excessive heat in their facilities and crumbling infrastructure that is hindering the operations of the Department and posing health and safety risks to inmates.

Senate Appropriations Committee

Lawmakers on the Appropriations Committee heard from one of the state’s top economists, Amy Baker of the Office of Economic and Demographic Research, to receive an update on Florida’s long-range financial outlook. In FY 23-24, Florida’s GDP is expected to drop from 3 percent to 2.5 percent and Florida’s Personal Income is also anticipated to decrease, from 7.8 percent to 5.6 percent. Since 2021, Florida has moved above the U.S. average in wages, and even with this looming decrease wages are expected to stay high and continue growing healthily. The unemployment rate is expected to increase slightly from the current 2.7 percent to 3 percent.

The current biggest economic driver in Florida is our state’s continued population growth, with the population of those who are 65+ years of age estimated to represent 25 percent of Florida’s total population in 2030. This will have a noteworthy impact on the funding decisions of future legislatures. Documentary Stamp Tax revenue saw a decline of 28 percent last year and is anticipated to continue to decrease by another 10 percent. Some of the critical needs identified for the state moving forward include education, Medicaid, FEMA matches after hurricanes, and health insurance shortfalls. When analyzing expected critical and high-priority needs, a surplus of revenue remains and is reflected through the next three years. However, there is an observed decrease in unallocated general revenue over time indicating that the projected expenditures are beginning to outpace available revenue, which can lead to a budget imbalance if not corrected. The downward shift over the next three years also raises concerns about future co-occurring risks, such as two major natural disasters hitting the state in one year. Florida’s long-range fiscal outlook is positive overall, with no anticipation of a recession in the next few years.

From The Governor's Office

On Thursday, October 12, Governor Ron DeSantis signed [Executive Order 23-208](#). The order authorizes state agencies to help provide transportation out of Israel for Americans left stranded in the country as a result of the current war. It also allows the governor to call on the National Guard and Florida State Guard to assist in dealing with this crisis. This order will allow Florida to charter flights back to the United States for Floridians currently in Israel and to provide supplies to the country. The Florida Division of Emergency Management now has a section on its website titled "Israel Assistance" located at [Israel Assistance | Florida Disaster](#). This site will take individuals to a form that can be completed to request evacuation.

Looking Ahead

Both the House and Senate will hold their next committee meetings on the week of October 16th. Committees scheduled to meet will continue to receive informational presentations and will not be considering any new legislation.

On Tuesday, October 17, Senate Republicans will convene to officially select Senate Majority Leader Ben Albritton (R-Wauchula) as the Senate President-Designate for the 2024-2026 term.

Committee Weeks

October 16-20, 2023

November 6-10, 2023

November 13-17, 2023

December 4-8, 2023

December 11-15, 2023

Legislative Session

January 9 - March 8, 2024

FAC Legislative Fly In

January 17, 2024

