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House Criminal Justice Subcommittee Passes Priority Legislation to Protect Florida's Most Vulnerable

Tallahassee, FL – The Florida House of Representatives Criminal Justice Subcommittee today passed a series of bills that will strengthen laws to protect children from sexually violent predators as part of the Legislature's "Protecting Florida's Vulnerable" agenda.

"As lawmakers, we have perhaps no greater responsibility than keeping our children safe from harm," said House Speaker Will Weatherford (R-Wesley Chapel). "By passing these common sense reforms, we are working to ensure Florida becomes the most unfriendly state in the nation for sexually violent predators."

"These reforms help to ensure children are protected and put sexually violent predators on notice that they will be punished to the fullest extent of the law," said Criminal Justice Subcommittee Chair Matt Gaetz (R-Fort Walton Beach). "We can no longer allow these violent criminals to slip through the cracks of our criminal justice and civil commitment systems and commit unthinkable repeat offenses against children."

Included in the House's "Protecting Florida's Vulnerable" initiative are a series of bills, including the following:

- ➤ PCB CRJS 14-03 requires the Department of Children and Families (DCF) to notify victims and the Department of Corrections (DOC) of the release of all persons in the custody of DCF not just those committed as a sexually violent predator. The bill also requires DCF to provide such notice to sheriffs in the county in which the person intends to reside or, if unknown, in the county in which the person was last convicted.
- ➤ PCB CRJS 14-04 strengthens the registration requirements applicable to sexual predators and offenders to bring those requirements further in line with the federal Adam Walsh Act.
- ➤ PCB CRJS 14-05 ensures that the probationary period of an offender in DCF's custody pursuant to the Jimmy Ryce Act does not begin until the person is released from DCF's custody.
- ➤ **PCB CRJS 14-06** closes a loophole by creating a process by which persons sentenced to a term of imprisonment in a jail can be referred to DCF for civil commitment.

➤ PCB CRJS 14-07 increases the penalties for specified sexual battery and lewd or lascivious offenses against children, increases the minimum mandatory sentence for dangerous sexual felony offenders to 50 years, requires the court to impose a split sentence in which an offender convicted of specified sexual offenses is sentenced to 2 years of community supervision after serving his or her term of imprisonment and creates a new sentencing multiplier for specified adult-on-minor sexual offenses.

Earlier this week, the House Healthy Families Subcommittee passed PCB HFS 14-01 also as part of the House's "Protecting Florida's Vulnerable" initiative. The legislation would raise standards and increase accountability in the DCF evaluation process for determining whether an offender meets criteria for commitment to the SVP Program.

For more information about this legislation, please visit the Florida House online.

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