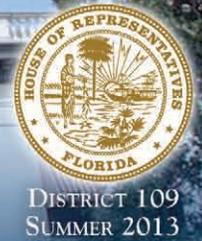




# LEGISLATIVE *News*



FLORIDA STATE REPRESENTATIVE **Cynthia A.**  
**STAFFORD**

## *Greetings From Representative Stafford*

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*Legislative Assistant, III*

**Tyrone Hall**  
*District Executive Secretary II*

### **Representative Committees**

Civil Justice Subcommittee  
(Democratic Ranking Member)

Appropriations Committee

Business & Professional  
Regulation Subcommittee

Education Committee

Joint Legislative Auditing Committee

Select Committee on Gaming

Greetings constituents and friends,

Thank you for the opportunity to serve this great community. I am thrilled to provide you another edition of my community newsletter for Florida House District 109.

I want you to know that I am working passionately on your behalf. During the most recent legislative session, I was proud to be a voice for you when decisions were being made on a whole host of important issues, such as employment discrimination, unemployment compensation, human trafficking, child safety, cancer treatment, housing for the elderly, and election reform.

As the representative from House District 109, I will continue to keep your concerns at the forefront and will work on your behalf.

In this issue of "Legislative News," you will learn about some of the key decisions made by the Florida Legislature, and my stance on them.

I sincerely hope that you enjoy and find this newsletter informative and useful. And as always, please feel free to reach out to me or my staff. We look forward to hearing from you!

God Bless!

*The Honorable Cynthia A. Stafford*

The Honorable Cynthia A. Stafford



## Notes From The Hill

### Rep. Stafford Debates Against Parent Trigger Bill



With passion, this year I debated firmly in opposition to House Bill 867, a “Parent Trigger” bill that thankfully failed to win final legislative passage for the second consecutive year.

During debate, I argued that the legislation may have unintended consequences, and I said that it could disrupt and dismantle communities, harm

our most vulnerable students, and lead to chaos in many traditional public schools.

Others may disagree, but I believe the Parent Trigger is completely unnecessary. There already are laws that allow School Advisory Councils, which are comprised of parents, teachers and community partners, to determine the direction of an underperforming school. That’s why I said during debate on the House floor that, “I reject the premise that parents do not have a voice” because I believe that they “not only have a voice but they also have a seat at the table” when it comes to helping to set education policies at the local level.

I believe that the Parent Trigger legislation, had it passed, would have turned public schools over to for-profit education companies, and it would have

done so based on a teacher evaluation system that, I think, is flawed.

When I argued against the Parent Trigger legislation, I said I believe that the fate of a public school shouldn’t rest solely on the views of the parents of students at a school any given year. Rather, I believe a school’s future should be decided by a broader group, including alumni of a school, the business community, members of the faith community, and others who have a vested interest in a school.

Instead of passing Parent Trigger legislation, I said that a better outcome for our education system would be for the Florida Legislature to do even more to better fund and to assist struggling schools. Therefore, I am very pleased the Parent Trigger legislation failed to become law.

### Rep. Stafford Debates Against Senate Bill 718 – Family Law Bill

A Family Law Bill, Senate Bill 718, that I opposed was approved by the Legislature during the 2013 session and later vetoed by the governor. I voted against the bill for a host of reasons, one of which is my belief that it would have a severely negative impact on parents’ time-sharing and child support arrangements, which I think could be harmful to children.

During House floor debate, I said the legislation would have been one-sided and unfair



to the advantage of persons paying alimony while making it harder for the person who receives alimony.

Among its components, the legislation would have changed the definition of a short-term marriage from 10 years to 11 years. The result, I think, would severely diminish opportunities and outcomes for stay-at-home parents with young children.

*Continued on page 6*



## Session Overview

### BUDGET:

A new state budget was approved without my support. I refused to vote for the \$74.5 billion spending plans because, among other reasons, it failed to meet the health care needs of all our citizens, especially Florida's most vulnerable residents without insurance. I think the Legislature should have used available federal dollars to provide health coverage to Florida's working families. As I see it, expanding health coverage would save lives, improve health outcomes and the economy, and would be a good way to put Floridians tax dollars to work in our state. I also couldn't support the budget because it includes a 3-percent increase in tuition at Florida's universities. I believe these tuition hikes, without corresponding increases to the state's Bright Futures Scholarship program, will only make it harder for some students to achieve the dream of a college education.

There are several components of the budget that I like; including an additional \$1-billion for public schools and teacher salaries, and modest raises for Florida's other public servants. The new dollars to education are especially needed because Florida is still catching up from several years of cuts in per-student funding. Unfortunately, the overall spending plan, I believe, failed in too many respects, and Florida deserves a better state budget.



### EDUCATION REFORM:

The 2013 legislative session was dedicated to considerable discussion and debate about education policy and reform in our state. I am pleased to have joined in many of those important conversations.

I believe we must create an innovative education environment that prepares our students to be globally competitive, prepares them for the needs of a modern and ever changing economy, and rewards hard work. Toward these goals, Senate Bill 1076, approved during the session, changes standard high school diploma requirements and should make education more relevant to our students. Among other steps, the legislation addresses a potential problem of thousand of Florida teenagers possibly not earning a high school diploma due to new graduation requirements. The Legislature addressed the crisis by removing some of the requirements, and also by creating

two new rigorous diploma designations – one for students pursuing college-level coursework, and another for those who complete industry-certification courses.

Meanwhile, several measures were proposed this year to tighten school security. Most of these efforts fell flat, but a bill that will prohibit cyber-bullying in schools statewide won approval. The proposal will give school principals greater authority to contend with online harassment of students.

A highly controversial bill, commonly known as “the parent trigger,” failed to win final legislative passage for the second consecutive year. The legislation would let parents demand major changes at struggling public schools, including dismissing the staff or enabling a charter school management company to run the school. Critics, such as the Florida PTA, have warned that the measure is an attempt to turn struggling public schools over to for-profit education companies.



### HEALTH CARE:

My top focus this session was – and still remains – full implementation of the Affordable Care Act, the nation's new health care law. That's why I stand eager to see Florida extend health care coverage to low-income Floridians. I believe the Florida Legislature can and should approve a plan to use available federal resources to offer private insurance to more people so that they can get preventative care, pay for doctor and hospital visits, and get the access they need to medicines and health treatments at an affordable price.

Today, roughly one of every five Floridians lack health insurance. By expanding health coverage, I believe the Legislature could save lives and improve health outcomes, create jobs and grow our economy, as well as to put Floridians' hard-earned tax dollars to work in our state.

I am disappointed that because of legislative inaction, Florida may reject tens of billions of dollars in federal funds over the next decade, money meant to help low-income Floridians see a doctor. But I remain hopeful that the voices of the people will be heard in support of health care for working families in Florida.





FLORIDA STATE REPRESENTATIVE **Cynthia A. STAFFORD** DISTRICT 109

## Community/Capitol Highlights



Rep. Stafford poses with Fatherhood Task Force of South Florida.



Rep. Stafford in Appropriations Committee.



Rep. Stafford participated in an Emerging Young Leader's Forum presented by Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority.



Members of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority met with Rep. Stafford at the Capitol.





Rep. Stafford reads "Ruby's Beauty Shop" to a group during Children's Week at the Capitol.



Rep. Stafford met with Interns and residents from Jackson Memorial Hospital at the Capitol.



Rep. Stafford attending a High School Graduation.



Rep. Stafford's Town Hall meeting overview 2013.



## Session Overview

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On May 1, 2013, prior to opening session of the Florida House of Representatives, the Rev. John S. Cowart I of Abiding Faith Christian Church in Gainesville offered the following prayer. It is one worth remembering. I am pleased to share it with you.

Heavenly Father, we come, first, to thank You for the opportunity to serve the great people of the state of Florida. We honor You for choosing every representative from their respective city and county. This morning, I ask that You allow them to be fruitful in their dialogue, respectful in their discussions, and thoughtful regarding the outcome. Keep them resourceful and dedicated to their constituents as they do what it takes to make things work. I pray You will keep them dreaming as they envision what will be best for Florida. Never let them grow weary or tired

in well-doing as they pursue the task before them. May You allow a spirit of collaboration, inspiration, and enthusiasm to reside in this place. And as You keep them open to change and Your direction, let every piece of legislation passed be beneficial to the people of Florida, today, tomorrow, and in the future. Bless them, protect them, and keep them in courage every day of their lives. And now may the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer. Amen.

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### FAMILY LAW BILL: *Continued from page 2*

“If the marriage does not work, there is a presumption (under the legislation) that the stay-at-home spouse will not get alimony,” I said during debate. And the only way to overcome the presumption, I argued, would be to go to court. “I believe this will result in a floodgate of litigation,” suggesting that family resources may get poured into legal battles between separated parents instead of helping children.

“This can’t be good for families,” I said,

“and it can’t be good for marriages.” I also argued the legislation would further have a detrimental impact on stay-at-home parents, especially women, who are not financially secure or prepared to enter the workforce, with little or no work history. I said the legislation also could be injurious for spouses who have never worked and who depend on alimony receipts and are also victims of spousal abuse. The changes, I said, would have added “another layer of control by abusers.”

I believe that to place these proposed restrictions on receiving alimony would shift family law policies from protecting the best interests of children toward protecting the best interest of a parent, which I think would be unfair and not right.

For these reasons and others, I characterized the proposal as “anti-marriage, anti-woman and mean spirited,” and it is why I refused to support the bill.



## Rep. Stafford's Quotes to Note: \_\_\_\_\_

Listed below are a collection of quotes to note from Rep. Stafford:

**Regarding gun control legislation:** "The way the law currently reads, a person claiming stand your ground need only have a reasonable belief that they are in imminent danger of great bodily harm or death. There is no provision that requires something other than a person's belief. This bill will require an overt act, in essence, an initial aggressive act that places the claimant in fear for their life."  
– The Miami Times (February 6, 2013)

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**Regarding judicial nominating commissions:** "The governor not only gets to pick who the judges are, he gets to pick who gives him the list. I think that upsets the balance of power here. I think we need to keep an independent judiciary."  
– Daily Business Review (February 22, 2013)

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**Regarding legislation concerning home foreclosures:** "The bill appears to diminish the rights of homeowners and consumers, while attempting to streamline the process. I don't see how this bill protects homeowners who have been victims of fraud and other unscrupulous activities."  
– The Miami Herald (April 17, 2013)

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**Regarding a bill about medical malpractice that I did not support and warned could hurt defendants:** "It would unduly restrict the pool of experts who will be available to testify."  
– The Tampa Tribune (May 1, 2013)





## Rep. Cynthia Stafford Community Time



Rep. Stafford talks to a group of students on career day.



Tiondre' Toomer served as Rep. Stafford's Page at the Capitol.



Rep. Stafford pictured with Ms. Dorothy Graham and Ms. Georgiana Bethel-Johnson, two retired teachers from Booker T. Washington Sr. High School.



Rep. Stafford pictured with Mary Cowart, her legislative assistant and Brandon Green, the District Office's first intern.

## Stay in Touch



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