



# HOUSE MAJORITY OFFICE

FLORIDA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES



REPRESENTATIVE RAY RODRIGUES, MAJORITY LEADER

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## **Subcommittee Unanimously Votes for Reforming Trade Secrets Law**

This week, the Oversight, Transparency & Administration Subcommittee passed HB 459 and HB 461, which will protect the public's right to know where, how, and under what terms taxpayer dollars are being spent and will provide greater clarity and uniformity for how agencies handle trade secrets. The bills specify that any contract or agreement entered into by a government agency is deemed a public record and is not a trade secret, thus stopping the practice of taxpayer-funded agencies hiding their spending behind trade secrets. This includes any financial information within the contract or agreement. In addition, HB 461 states that in order for an agency to protect a record marked and verified as containing a trade secret, the person who verified the record must seek a declaratory judgment to determine if the record requested is officially a trade secret. This will ensure government agencies are not placed in the position of defending another person's trade secret.

I support holding government agencies accountable because I believe these agencies should have complete transparency and always disclose how they are spending taxpayer dollars. I look forward to updating you on this important legislation.

## **Excellence in Higher Education Act of 2018 Passes House Subcommittee**

This week, the Post-Secondary Education Subcommittee passed HB 423, which establishes the Excellence in Higher Education Act of 2018. The goal of HB 423 is to maintain and improve the quality of higher education in Florida.

The bill revises multiple student financial aid and tuition assistance programs. One of the biggest changes is to the Florida Bright Futures Scholarship. Specifically, the bill will cover the full cost of tuition and fees plus a stipend of \$300 for books for the Florida Bright Futures Academic Scholars award. The Florida Medallion Scholars award will cover 75% of the full cost of tuition and fees. The bill also expands the Benacquisto Scholarship to include qualified out-of-state students and increases funding for the First Generation Matching Grant Program. I believe the increases and expansion of these scholarships will provide more students with the chance to pursue and achieve their higher education goals.

HB 423 also makes changes to the State University System Performance-Based Incentive metrics. The bill requires the Board of Governors to develop a plan to transition from a partial performance-based funding model to a complete performance-based continuous improvement-funding model. In this new system, each university will compete against its own past performance, thus eliminating unnecessary competition between universities for the state investment in performance funding. I believe this will further incentivize our universities to reach their personalized goals and in turn, enhance university performance.



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The bill also increases oversight of state university direct-support organizations (DSO), by requiring the university board of trustees to approve appointments to DSO, increasing public access to records, and phasing out the ability for universities to transfer any state appropriations to a DSO for any reason other than funds pledged for debt.

Additionally, to promote the free flow of ideas on our state university campuses, the Board of Governors will annually survey students, faculty and administrators on the intellectual freedom and viewpoint diversity at each institution. I believe students and faculty should be able to freely express their viewpoint on university campuses without fear.

I proudly support this bill and any effort to strengthen our state university system, hold them accountable to the students and the taxpayer, and continue to give opportunities to all students.

## **House Subcommittee Passes School District Accountability Bill**

This week, the PreK-12 Quality Subcommittee passed HB 1279, a comprehensive bill that brings a new level of financial transparency and accountability to Florida's education spending, while also driving productivity improvements and parity between school districts.

The bill produces greater financial transparency by requiring school districts to post on their websites summary financial data regarding the efficiency of dollars spent by the district, and it requires the Department of Education to create an online tool that identifies public schools that produce high academic achievement based on per pupil spending. It also requires school districts to post summary financial information, which includes detailed information regarding the amount spent per student for instructional staff and administrative staff. The results must be reported in an easy to use format and must allow the user to performance data among schools and districts.

In addition to requiring more data reporting, the bill also takes steps to increase the financial accountability of school districts to prevent financial emergencies. HB 1279 requires large school districts to employ an auditor, limits the amount that school board members are compensated to the amount no higher than that of first year teachers, withholds superintendent and school board salaries during a financial emergency and only until the financial emergency no longer exists, and allows for greater oversight from the Auditor General.

I believe this bill ensures that our state's public schools use your tax dollars in the most efficient and effective way possible. I am proud to support legislation that gives Florida's taxpayers the transparency and accountability they deserve from their elected officials.

## **Florida House Committee Delivers Final Recommendations to Improve the State's Hurricane Response**

This week, the Select Committee on Hurricane Response & Preparedness held its final meeting and unanimously voted to approve their Final Recommendations to help improve Florida's Hurricane Response and Preparedness.



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The members of the Select Committee believe that as Florida proceeds with recovery from Hurricane Irma and provides assistance to the people of Puerto Rico recovering from Hurricane Maria, it is imperative that state policy makers take advantage of the lessons learned from our recent experiences.

During the past few weeks, House members had the opportunity to review, discuss, and determine the best recommendations for the committee to consider. The Committee encouraged members to submit their ideas on how to improve our state's response to hurricanes, and members' delivered. The recommendations were distilled from the published list of recommendations received by the committee during its hearings and in writing, from member recommendations, and from comments and suggestions provided by executive agencies and others.

The fundamental themes addressed by the recommendations include: Vulnerable Populations Residing in Health Care and Residential Facilities, Shelters and Vulnerable Populations, Evacuations, Hardening and Restoring Florida's Electric Grid, Restoring Our Communities, and Mitigating Future Damages.

I strongly support the efforts of the committee to examine how our states can best prepare for the next hurricane. I will continue to keep you updated as your Florida House works to protect our community and state. If you would like to view the final report from the committee it is available at <http://bit.ly/2mRD7Rw>

## **Florida House Committee examines Hurricane Preparation Sales Tax Holiday**

This week, the Ways & Means Committee discussed Hurricane-related tax reduction concepts relating to generators and disaster homestead property tax relief. These recommendations are a few of the numerous ideas that came from the Select Committee on Hurricane Response & Preparedness over the past three months.

The first recommendation would exempt from sales and use tax the purchase of any equipment that uses natural gas or liquefied petroleum gas to generate emergency electric energy at nursing homes and assisted living facilities. The exemption is limited to a maximum of \$30,000 of tax for the purchase of equipment for any one facility. The second recommendation considers providing ad valorem property tax reduction for homestead property found uninhabitable by Hurricane Irma.

I believe that Florida must begin preparing for this year's hurricane season and strongly support the committee's efforts to spur discussion on hurricane-related tax reductions. Such actions will continue our mission of preparing our state for the next storm.

## **Florida House Reviews SB 10 Implementation**

This week, the Natural Resources & Public Lands Subcommittee received an update from the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) on SB 10 (2017), which addresses the creation of the EAA storage reservoir south of Lake Okeechobee to address the freshwater discharges that affect estuaries on the east and west coasts.



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During the update, the water management district identified five alternative plans that would utilize publically owned lands south of Lake Okeechobee to create the reservoir. The district suggested that two of the five alternatives would be the best buy and most cost effective.

Additionally, the SFWMD has continued working with and making meaningful progress on this issue with its partner, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. This relationship is critical in order to obtain the approvals and cost-share funding credit necessary from the federal government to begin construction and eventual operation of the EAA Storage Reservoir.

Your Florida House will continue to ensure that SB 10 is implemented properly to make sure we protect our environment. We applaud the efforts of the SFWMD in moving forward so quickly in addressing this issue.