



HOUSE MAJORITY OFFICE

FLORIDA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES



REPRESENTATIVE RAY RODRIGUES, MAJORITY LEADER

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.

Florida House Approves House Budget

This week, the full House passed the recommended budget for FY 2018-2019. Our budget continues our conservative approach of responsibly funding our state's critical needs, including significant investments in hurricane response and preparedness, education, and the opioid epidemic. The House budget also continues our commitment to tax relief by buying back the value of property value growth in the K-12 funding formula to prevent property tax increases. Finally, the budget responsibly plans for the future by placing \$3.5 billion in reserves to prepare for any unforeseen future economic uncertainty.

I believe this budget covers important elements that will positively affect all Floridians while also securing long-term budget surpluses for the future.

Education Bill Passes House Floor

This week, the Florida House passed HB 7055, which is a comprehensive package of reforms that incorporates many of the bills you have seen so far this session and furthers our goal to provide a world-class education to all children in Florida.

The bill incorporates HB 1279 School District Accountability, HB 1 The Hope Scholarship Program and the education related provisions from HB 25 Labor Organizations and HB 29 Military and Veterans Affairs.

The provisions from HB 25 in the bill include reforms to the annual public employee union registration renewal process to increase transparency and accountability for those organizations that represent instructional personnel.

A few of the provisions from HB 29 in the bill include waiving certain educator initial licensing fees and establishing a pathway for veteran officers to become certified school principals. In addition, to enhance our students understanding of the sacrifices made by our brave military men and women, March 25th of every year will be designated as "Medal of Honor Day" and Florida schools are encouraged to incorporate the significance of the Medal of Honor in classroom discussion.

The bill also increases access to quality school choice options by expanding the allowable uses of the Gardiner Scholarship, establishing Reading Scholarship accounts for struggling readers and allowing high-performing charter schools to replicate two schools, and use projected capacity to justify enrollment or grade level expansion. The bill enhances accountability of private schools participating in scholarship programs.



HOUSE MAJORITY OFFICE

FLORIDA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES



REPRESENTATIVE RAY RODRIGUES, MAJORITY LEADER

The bill also increases district flexibility by expanding the Principal Autonomy program statewide and allows highly trained principals, upon execution of an agreement with the district school board, to manage multiple schools. Furthermore, the bill authorizes superintendents, upon school board approval, to organize schools under an independent governing board to provide teachers with freedom to teach and meet the academic needs of students.

Other polices in the bill include providing the Commissioner of Education with authority to coordinate resources during an emergency; removes provisions providing funding for dual enrollment textbooks for home education students and private schools to pay colleges for dual enrollment; requires the administration of paper based English and language arts and math assessments for grades 7-8; and providing Florida Virtual School students access to district testing facilities.

I support this bill because I believe this comprehensive package of reforms will create transformational change in Florida's educational system and ensures a bright future for generations to come.

Committee Unanimously Votes for Reforming Trade Secrets Law

This week, the Government Accountability Committee 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 certain financial information related to an agency contract or agreement is not a trade secret, thus stopping the practice of taxpayer-funded agencies hiding their spending behind trade secrets. This includes the amount of money paid, any payment structure or plan, expenditures, incentives, bonuses, fees, and penalties 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 disclose how they are spending taxpayer dollars. I look forward to updating you on this important legislation.

Military and Veterans Bill Passes Last Committee Stop

This week, the Appropriations Committee passed HB 29, which eases professional licensing fees and requirements for certain military members, veterans, and their spouses.

A military and veteran presence will forever be important to our state. These brave men and women not only place themselves in harm's way to protect our freedom and liberty, they are also a stable and significant force in Florida's growing economy.

We are grateful to those courageous Floridians who have made the selfless decision to serve our country. We will never be able to repay them for the sacrifices they have made, but in an effort to express our



HOUSE MAJORITY OFFICE

FLORIDA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES



REPRESENTATIVE RAY RODRIGUES, MAJORITY LEADER

gratitude, the bill will provide allowances for military members, veterans, and their spouses by expanding or creating fee waivers and select regulatory waivers for a variety of professional licenses.

The bill also designates March 25 every year as “Medal of Honor Day” and allows classroom instruction related to the values of the recipients of the Congressional Medal of Honor to meet certain instructional requirements on character development and the contributions of veterans to our country. I believe this goes a long way towards ensuring that future generations appreciate the sacrifices made to protect our freedoms and liberties.

I support this bill and any measure that strengthens support for our military and gives them the opportunity to succeed in Florida’s workforce.

Florida House Judiciary Committee Votes to Protect the Sanctity of Life

In the fifth week of the 2018 Legislative Session, the Florida House Judiciary Committee passed HB 1429 to prohibit dismemberment abortions.

A dilation and evacuation (D&E) abortion is a two-step process consisting of the nonsurgical dilation of the woman’s cervix and the surgical evacuation of her uterus. D&Es commonly involve dismembering the fetus with forceps as part of the evacuation procedure. Usually, the fetus is alive when this dismemberment begins. The bill fully defines this part of the procedure, known as a dismemberment abortion, but the details may be too graphic for some readers. If you would like to view the full text of the bill it is available at: <http://bit.ly/2DsIVL4>.

HB 1429 makes it a crime and a licensure violation for a physician to dismember a living fetus.

The bill does not prohibit D&Es; only dismemberment of a living fetus as part of that procedure. The bill does not apply to a dismemberment abortion that is necessary to save the life of a mother, provided that no other medical procedure would suffice for that purpose. The bill also prohibits the state from prosecuting a patient for conspiracy, when a dismemberment abortion is performed on her.

Your Florida House is committed to protecting the unborn. The destruction of a living fetus by dismemberment runs contrary to the values we hold dear. This conversation - while difficult - is one from which the Florida House will not shy away when innocent life is at stake.

Hope Scholarship Passes House Education Committee

Every student deserves to learn in a safe environment. In the 2015-16 school year, over 47,000 Florida public school students were victims of incidents such as battery, bullying, harassment, hazing, physical attacks, sexual assault, battery and harassment.

This week, the Education Committee passed HB 1, which establishes The Hope Scholarship program that creates a pathway for students who are subjected to an act of violence or abuse at school to pursue their education with hope, dignity, and an opportunity for success.



HOUSE MAJORITY OFFICE

FLORIDA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES



REPRESENTATIVE RAY RODRIGUES, MAJORITY LEADER

These students will have the option to attend another public school in or out of their district, or an eligible private school of their choice. If the student is enrolled in a public school outside of the district, they are eligible for a transportation scholarship up to \$750. If they choose to attend a private school, they can receive a scholarship that will be funded through taxpayer donations to a scholarship funding organization by individuals who purchase or register a motor vehicle in Florida.

I support this program because it allows students to get away from an unhealthy situation and empowers parents to choose a school where their child will thrive in an environment that is conducive to learning.

Fix to Florida's Policy on Open Carry Passes Judiciary Committee

This week, the House Judiciary Committee passed HB 39, which fixes a problem encountered by the concealed weapon license holders. A concealed weapon license holder is allowed by law to carry a concealed weapon. Current law says that a concealed weapon license holder does not violate the state's open carry law where the license holder's weapon is "briefly and openly" displayed. This common sense exception protects license holders from liability for unintentional display of their weapon. Unfortunately, different interpretations of the word "briefly" have led to unnecessary arrests of concealed weapon license holders. Under the bill, a concealed firearm that is "temporarily and openly displayed" by a concealed weapon license holder does not violate the open carry law. Where such display is beyond temporary, the license holder can be charged with violating the open carry law but the penalties for first and second offenses are less than a criminal penalty. This will allow us to stop criminalizing law-abiding individuals for harmless accidents.

I support this bill because it protects citizens' Second Amendment rights, and I look forward to updating you as the bill heads to the House Floor for the entire House to consider.

House Education Committee Passes School District Accountability Bill

This week, the Education Committee 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 compare 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 internal auditor, limits the amount that school board members are compensated to the



HOUSE MAJORITY OFFICE

FLORIDA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES



REPRESENTATIVE RAY RODRIGUES, MAJORITY LEADER

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 Eliminates Unnecessary Regulation

The Health Care Appropriations Subcommittee passed HB 1047, which addresses matters relating to the Florida Department of Health, to reduce government regulation of nutrition advice.

The bill authorizes individuals to provide dietary or nutrition advice, even for compensation, as long as they do not hold themselves out as, or imply that they are licensed as, dietitians or nutritionists. This removes the regulations in our state that penalize individuals, such as fitness trainers and health coaches, for providing dietary or nutrition advice for compensation.

Your Florida House is dedicated to reducing regulations that will create an environment where businesses can grow and thrive while also protecting Floridian's safety and welfare.

Excellence in Higher Education Act of 2018 Passes House Subcommittee

This week, the Higher Education Appropriations 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.

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



HOUSE MAJORITY OFFICE

FLORIDA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES



REPRESENTATIVE RAY RODRIGUES, MAJORITY LEADER

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.

Florida House Appropriations Committee Passes Prescription Drug Transparency

This week the Appropriations Committee passed HB 351, which prohibits certain practices within Florida's pharmacy process that limit patient access to pricing information and requires pharmacists to disclose the lowest cost available for a customer's prescription drug.

The bill requires pharmacists to communicate to a patient the availability of a lower cost alternative drug if one exists and whether the patient's cost sharing obligation exceeds the retail price of a drug in the absence of prescription drug coverage. The bill also requires a contract between a pharmacy benefit managers (PBM) and a health plan to limit patient cost sharing for a drug to the lesser of the applicable cost sharing amount, the total submitted charges, or the retail price.

Under this bill, your local pharmacist would have the freedom to disclose your true prescription drug cost options. The bureaucracy surrounding pharmacy care and management would be prohibited from applying any mechanism preventing you from paying the lowest applicable price for a particular drug. Decrease red-tape, decrease health care costs.

Your Florida House is dedicated to passing legislation that will ensure that Floridians are presented with all the facts about their prescription drug costs. I strongly support this measure because it will increase access to quality and affordable health care for all Floridians.