



RSA
CONSULTING GROUP, LLC

2023
LEGISLATIVE SESSION
REPORT

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Session Overview

The legislature adjourned Sine Die on May 5th after passing 356 bills and a record \$117 billion budget.

Against the backdrop of a post-election climate that saw Florida shift further red and the Governor's pursuit of higher office, lawmakers navigated a range of pressing issues. With a renewed focus on education, healthcare, the environment, criminal justice, and economic development, Florida's policymakers displayed their dedication to shaping a prosperous future. Several controversial bills made national headlines, including legalizing permitless carry, a 6-week abortion ban, removal of DEI in post-secondary education, and DeSantis's battle with Disney.

With Republican supermajorities in both the House and Senate and a Governor who was reelected by a substantial margin, the landscape was set for policy to move with fewer obstacles than in past years. Governor DeSantis' aspirations for higher office greatly influenced the legislative landscape. Although he chose to withhold the official campaign announcement until after the session ended, it was widely expected that he would run for president in 2024.

This session featured new legislative leadership, with House Speaker Paul Renner and Senate President Kathleen Passidomo taking the gavels in their respective chambers. The new legislative leadership worked closely with the Governor's office, and this session passed without any significant disagreements between the two.

In past years, we usually see some level of disagreement among executive and legislative priorities, but this session was different. There was a great deal of consensus among legislators and the Governor, resulting in many of his proposed initiatives passing into law. Although the new leadership teams did successfully implement some of their own priority bills, such as affordable housing reform, much of this year's action was driven by the Plaza level rather than the fourth-floor leadership.

Education Takes Center Stage

Education reform emerged as one of the primary themes of the session. With a commitment to enhancing the state's educational system, lawmakers made strides in increasing funding for public schools, expanding school choice options, and prioritizing teacher salary improvements. Attention was also directed towards vocational and technical education programs and initiatives aimed at promoting STEM education and bridging the achievement gap among students.

Session Overview

Navigating Healthcare Priorities

The session witnessed a robust discourse on healthcare policies. Acknowledging the need for improved access to affordable healthcare, legislators set their sights on addressing this crucial issue. Measures were passed to lower prescription drug costs, bolster mental health services, and expand Florida Kidcare coverage among declining Medicaid enrollments. The goal was to ensure that Floridians had access to quality healthcare, particularly in underserved rural areas.

Boosting Economic Development

The session was marked by a dedicated focus on fostering economic growth and job creation. Through a series of bills, the legislature aimed to attract new businesses, support entrepreneurship, and enhance workforce training programs. Streamlining regulations, promoting tourism, and investing in infrastructure development were key components of the economic agenda.

The Ongoing Debate

While progress was made on various fronts, contentious issues inevitably arose during the session. Voting rights and election integrity remained topics of intense debate. Legislators introduced bills to update election procedures, strengthen voter identification requirements, and improve ballot security. These measures sparked vigorous discussions and faced legal challenges, reflecting the complexity and importance of these issues

Please note that at the time of publication, the Governor has yet to sign several of bills passed by the legislature, including the budget.

Session Stats

\$117

BILLION

BUDGET

FY 2023-2024

356

Bills

Passed

\$5 BILLION

**HIGHER THAN
LAST YEAR**

483

**Bills Passed In Only
One Chamber**

PREVIOUS BUDGETS

2022 - \$112 bn

2021 - \$101.5 bn

2020 - \$92.3 bn

3229

Votes Taken

3656

Bills Filed

2674

Amendments

GENERAL APPROPRIATIONS ACT

The Budget

“

The House budget allocates funds to fortify our state, address long-term infrastructure needs, invest in Florida’s workforce, transform how we deliver public education, and more. I commend Chair Leek and his Appropriations Subcommittee Chairs for delivering a balanced budget that upholds the shared goals and values of all Floridians.

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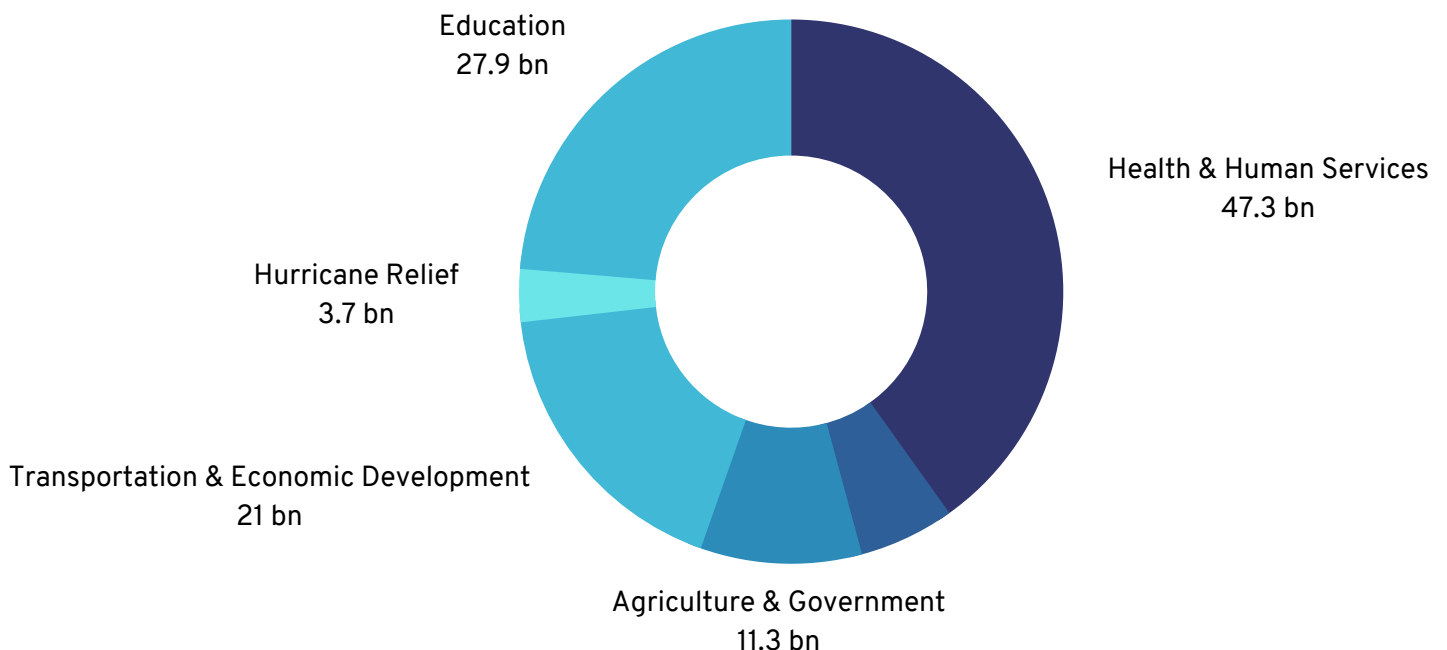
- Speaker Paul Renner

Budget

FY 2023-2024
Total
\$117 bn

This year's record \$117 billion budget came in at 4.2% higher than last year's. Following the Legislature passing the General Appropriations Act, it will now be sent to the Governor for his signature, where he has the power of line-item veto. Last year, Governor DeSantis vetoed a record \$3 billion from the budget.

The budget takes effect July 1, and he has until then to issue his vetoes and signature. Overall, the main priorities of the Speaker and President came down to affordable housing, environmental protection and outdoor recreation, universal school vouchers, and expanding access to KidCare, a safety net insurance program through the state for families who make too much to qualify for Medicaid but are not covered by their jobs for, or cannot afford commercial insurance. These three issues, along with a forthcoming presidential announcement from DeSantis drove the conversation around the budget process and resulted in what looked like an early timeline for budget negotiations. This year, the legislature started negotiations earlier in the session than usual, but as usual, ended up approving the final budget in the last days of session.



Budget

HIGHLIGHTS

While many of the states around the country have seen or are on the brink of recession, Florida is experiencing the opposite with a booming economy. This is important when building a balanced budget, which is the only directed job of the state legislature per Florida's Constitution. Because of this surplus, the Speaker and President were able to see their priorities come to fruition.

The Speaker's main budget priorities were expanding access to KidCare and the state's school voucher system, referred to as the "universal voucher program." Expanding access to KidCare will become a reality through total funding of \$68.4 million, covering the changes to the enrollment threshold and eligibility. This increase will serve an anticipated 248,521 children across Florida. Under Speaker Renner's leadership, lawmakers approved a record \$26.7 billion for the Florida Education Finance Program (FEFP). That number is \$2.2 billion over the current fiscal year, amounting to \$8,648.11/student. In addition, \$350 million was set aside for the Educational Stabilization Program to help hedge against unanticipated financial impacts from the school voucher expansion.

President Passidomo was also successful in her priorities, with \$711 million in the budget to help expand workforce housing. She also championed the expansion of the statewide wildlife corridor, which will be funded through \$850 million. This amount is more than half of what she initially requested. This funding will protect and preserve approximately 72,000 acres of conservation and agricultural land made up of the primary and secondary habitats of the Florida Panther. In addition, her chamber led the charge on expanding access to the corridor by including \$200 million in additional dollars for bike and hiking trails.

The Legislature included another 5% pay increase for all state employees, following a 5% increase in last year's budget. This across-the-board raise will ensure that the State of Florida stays competitive in its compensation packages, making them a viable option for quality workers and retaining those already on the state's payroll. After two major hurricanes in 2023, the budget prudently includes a \$1.4 billion increase to the Emergency Preparedness and Response Fund.

The facts and figures listed in the budget breakdown below are valid as of May 31st, prior to the budget being signed by the Governor, and are therefore subject to change.

Budget

TAX RELIEF PACKAGE

In theme with the Budget, Lawmakers approved the largest tax relief plan in Florida history, which was signed by Governor DeSantis on May 25. The tax package is estimated to save Floridians \$2.7 billion, helping to save a family of four as much as \$1,000 over the upcoming year.

With the start of the new fiscal year on July 1, personal hygiene products like toothbrushes, toothpaste, soap, and mouthwash, as well as baby and toddler necessities such as diapers, wipes, baby food, and baby and toddler clothing, will be permanently tax-free. Starting July 1, 2023, through June 30, 2024 (FY 23-24), energy star appliances and gas stoves will be tax-exempt. This is in response to President Joe Biden's administration's efforts to ban gas stoves earlier this year.

Several sales tax holidays are also included in this year's tax package. The back-to-school sales tax holiday has been extended and now lasts a total of 4 weeks – two weeks leading up to the fall semester (July 24 – August 6, 2023) and two weeks leading up to the spring semester (January 1 – January 14, 2024). Lawmakers created a new tax exemption, labeled the “Freedom Summer,” which spans from Memorial Day to Labor Day. During this sales tax holiday, tax is not due on the retail sale of admissions to concerts, movies, and state parks, to name a few; also included are eligible boating and water activity supplies, camping supplies, fishing supplies, general outdoor supplies, residential pool supplies, children's athletic equipment, and children's toys. The Disaster Preparedness Sales Tax Holidays (May 26 – June 9, 2023, and August 26 – September 8, 2023) and the Tool Time Tax Holiday (September 2 – September 8, 2023) were also included in the Tax package and will return in FY 2023-24.

The facts and figures listed in the budget breakdown below are valid as of May 31st, prior to the budget being signed by the Governor, and are therefore subject to change.

Budget

EDUCATION



Total

\$27.9 bn

The 23-24 education budget is the largest in history and centers around continuing to make Florida a leader in education from VPK – Post Secondary. Lawmakers put a record \$26.7 billion into the Florida Education Finance Program, the primary funding source for public schools, a \$2.2 billion increase over the current year. The average per-student spending will climb to \$8,648, up \$405 from last year, a 5% boost. The FEFP has always included many "categorical" line items that define the distribution of dollars. However, this year, the House rolled money for some instructional material, classroom supplies, and other specific spending into the overall funding base given to each county. Lawmakers also bolstered a multi-year plan to boost teacher salaries. The budget also includes \$350 million for what has been dubbed the Educational Enrollment Stabilization Program, which would help hedge against the unanticipated financial impacts of expanding school vouchers.

Includes:

- \$1.6 billion for early learning
- \$26.7 billion for public schools K12 - FEFP
 - Total FEFP funds increased by \$2.2 billion, or 9.04%
 - Base Student Allocation increased by 12.04%
 - Teacher salary increase by \$252 million.
 - Increase of \$40 million for school safety initiatives, to total \$250 million
 - Mental health resources increased by \$20 million, to total \$160 million
 - Educational Enrichment Allocation (new) - \$825 million
 - Educational Enrollment Stabilization Program - \$350 million
- \$585 million Public Schools K12 Non-FEFP programs
 - Funding for projects such as School Recognition Program (\$200 million), Coach Aaron Feis Guardian Program (\$6.5 million), Autism Programs (\$12 million), Early Childhood Music Education (\$10.4 million)
- \$619 million for School District Workforce
 - \$390 million for workforce development for career and technical education and adult education
 - \$20 million for nursing education initiatives
- \$2.4 billion for Florida College System
 - No tuition increases
 - \$59 million for nursing education incentives
- \$6.4 billion for State University System
 - No tuition increase

HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES



Total

\$47.3 bn

Falling in line with Speaker Renner's priority to support children and families in the FY 23-24 budget, the healthcare silo includes \$2.8 billion for healthcare programs, including Medicaid rate increases and program expansions. The Speaker's #1 priority in the health care budget was expanding access to KidCare, which was accomplished through an increase of \$68.4 million between KidCare eligibility and enrollment. Medicaid rate increases include the Children's Hospital Inpatient rate, the Pediatric Physician rate, and the Pediatric Behavioral Health Care Services rate, to name a few. Both chambers championed funding increases for mental and behavioral health, including \$195.8 million for mental health disorder services and \$295.4 million in resources to combat the opioid epidemic. Lastly, the Senate prioritized additional dollars for residency slots and medical loan repayment programs to entice more healthcare professionals to our state.

Highlights:

- \$35.6 billion - Agency for Health Care Administration
 - \$20.6 million - expand KidCare Access
 - \$73.5 million Medicaid provider rate increases
- \$2.3 billion - Agency for Persons with Disabilities
- \$4.7 billion - Department of Children and Families
 - Child Welfare
 - \$20 million for foster care and guardianship board payments
 - Mental Health and Substance Abuse
 - \$156.3 million for community-based behavioral health services block grants
 - \$110.6 million for state opioid response grants
 - \$173.5 million for opioid treatment, prevention and recovery from opioid settlement funds
- \$482.5 million - Department of Elder Affairs
- \$3.8 billion - Department of Health
 - \$30.8 million for school health services
 - \$12.7 million for expansion of maternal health using telehealth
- \$201 million - Department of Veterans Affairs

Criminal & Civil Justice



Total

\$6.7 bn

At \$6.7 billion, the FY 2023-24 criminal and civil justice budget is slightly smaller than last year's version (\$6.9 billion). One highlight in this section of the spending plan is funding that will help promote recruitment and retention in Florida's correctional facilities. In addition to raising starting salaries for correctional officers to \$45,760 (\$22 per hour), approximately \$19 million was included in the budget to provide bonuses of \$5000 to officers at 15 state-run facilities with the highest vacancy rates. These bonuses are in addition to a 5% across-the-board pay raise for all state employees. Salaries for Department of Juvenile Justice residential providers were also increased to \$19 per hour, as were salaries for Children In Need of Services/Families In Need of Services (CINS/FINS) providers.

To address inmate needs, \$107 million was budgeted for health services, and over \$39 million was provided to expand educational opportunities in prisons. This funding will provide opportunities for the large number of younger inmates who do not have high school diplomas or GEDs.

Various spending items were included to combat the state's opioid crisis, including \$5 million for in-prison and community-based substance abuse treatment and \$20 million for the State Assistance for Fentanyl Eradication (S.A.F.E.) program. Finally, \$9 million was included in the budget for the construction of the Bernie McCabe Second District Court of Appeals, which will be located in St. Petersburg and was a priority for former Speaker Chris Sprowls.

Highlights:

- \$3.3 billion - Department of Corrections
- \$352 million - Attorney General
- \$490 million - Florida Department of Law Enforcement
 - \$1 million for E-Verify Staffing
 - \$20 million for State Assistance for Fentanyl Eradication (S.A.F.E) Program
- \$666.2 million - Department of Juvenile Justice
 - \$17.2 million to increase DJJ secure and non-secure residential provider pay
- \$1.2 billion - Justice Administrative Commission
- \$712.7 million - State Court System

Budget

Transportation, Tourism & Economic Development



Total
\$21 bn

A major focus of this year's transportation and economic development budget is relieving traffic congestion throughout the state. \$4 billion was included for the Moving Florida Forward initiative, a priority for Governor DeSantis to accelerate various highway projects across the state. Funding was also increased for the Department of Transportation's 5-year work plan, from \$12.6 billion in FY 22-23 to \$13.6 billion this year.

\$80 million was provided for VISIT Florida, the state's tourism marketing agency. This funding—a \$30 million increase from last year—is far from the Florida House's original proposal, which would have zeroed out the agency's budget. \$75 million was also allocated to the state's Job Growth Grant Fund. Appropriations tied to a couple of important bills also fall under this silo—\$711 million for affordable housing associated with Senate Bill 102 (the Live Local Act) and \$200 million through Senate Bill 106 to connect the state's trail network with the Florida Wildlife Corridor.

Highlights:

- \$1.82 billion - Department of Economic Opportunity
 - \$118 million for Housing and Community Development Projects
 - \$75 million for Florida Job Growth Grant Fund
 - \$80 million for VISIT FLORIDA
 - \$20 million for law enforcement recruitment bonus program
 - \$11.9 million for workforce projects
- \$711 million for Affordable Housing Projects under SB 102
 - \$100 million for Florida Hometown Heroes, \$252 million for SHIP, \$259 million for SAIL, and \$100 million Inflation Loan Program for SAIL
- \$578.6 million - Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles
- \$296 million - Department of Military Affairs
- \$220.5 million - Department of State
- \$15.2 billion - Department of Transportation
 - \$13.6 billion for Transportation Work Program
 - \$8 million for an Innovative Grant Program for Transportation Disadvantaged
- \$2.8 billion - Division of Emergency Management
 - \$350 million for Hurricane Recovery Grant Programs

Agriculture & General Government



Total

\$11.3 bn

Major investments in Florida's environment and natural resources were made in this year's state budget. \$1.1 billion was set aside for land acquisition, including \$100 million in recurring funding to conserve critical land through the Florida Forever Program, \$100 million to protect agricultural land through the Rural and Family Lands Protection Program, and \$850 million to acquire lands within the state's wildlife corridor. The latter item was a priority for Senate President Passidomo. \$624.6 million was also included for restoration and water quality projects in the Everglades. The budget provides \$1 billion in total for water quality improvement projects.

To address the growing impact of sea level rise and flooding, \$320 million was budgeted for the Resilient Florida Program. This funding will finance projects associated with the Department of Environmental Protection's Statewide Flooding and Sea Level Rise Resilience Plan, which was established by a 2021 bill and is intended to help coordinate a statewide response to the effects of climate change.

Highlights:

- \$3 billion - Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services
 - \$100 million for rural and family land protection
 - \$17.5 million for feeding programs/farm share/feeding Florida
- \$35.1 million - Department of Citrus
- \$4.9 billion - Department of Environmental Protection
 - \$574 million for Everglades restoration
 - \$300 million for flood and sea-level rise program
 - \$1 billion for Florida Forever Programs and Land Acquisition
- \$172 million - Department of Business & Professional Regulation
- \$28.6 million - Florida Gaming Control Commission
- \$679.3 million - Department of Financial Services
- \$517.6 million - Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission
- \$223 million - Department of Lottery
- \$903.5 million - Department of Management Services
 - \$6 million for Sixth District Court of Appeal New Courthouse Planning & Design
 - \$40 million for Local Government Cybersecurity Grants

SPECIAL SESSIONS

The Highlights

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The Legislature of the State of Florida is convened in Special Session for the sole and exclusive purpose of considering legislation related to (a) property insurance, (b) reinsurance, (c) changes to the Florida building code to improve the affordability of property insurance, (d) the Office of Insurance Regulation, (e) civil remedies, and (f) appropriations.

”

-Governor Ron DeSantis

Special Sessions

Since the 2022 election, Florida legislators have convened for two special sessions.

DECEMBER 2022

The first Special Session, called in December 2022, was in response to the property insurance crisis caused by Hurricane Ian.

Hurricane Relief

SB 4-A, provided \$750 million for additional disaster relief to Floridians following Hurricane Ian and Hurricane Nicole, including \$350 million to support the entire portion of local government match for FEMA Public Assistance, freeing up local funds to undertake additional hurricane recovery and mitigation projects. The bill also provided \$150 million to continue efforts to support homeowners and renters impacted by the storms through the Hurricane Housing Program and Rental Recovery Loan Program.

Property Insurance Reform

The legislature also passed SB 2-A, the most significant property insurance reform bill in recent history, which helps to stabilize Florida's property insurance market, increase competition, and strengthen consumer protections. This bill eliminated one-way attorney fees for property insurance claims, reduced timelines for insurers to get payments out the door and back into the hands of policyholders as they rebuild their lives, and built on reforms passed earlier this year by committing additional funding to provide temporary reinsurance support to help stabilize our market.

FEBRUARY 2023

The second Special Session came in early February and replaced the 5th scheduled interim committee week. Lawmakers were called to cover a variety of issues, including Emergency Management, Illegal Immigration, Election Fraud, Intercollegiate Athletics, and three local bills. One of which pertained to the former Reedy Creek Improvement District, which governed Walt Disney World.

Hurricane Relief

The first bill was SB 2B - Emergency Response, which granted an additional \$700 million to local governments for relief from Hurricanes Ian and Nicole. Eligible Local government will receive funds based on demonstrated need. The bill also created the Local Government Emergency Bridge Loan Program within the Department of Economic Opportunity.

Special Sessions

Statewide Prosecutor

The statewide prosecutor bill, SB 4B, was created in response to the arrest of 20 people on allegations they cast ballots while being ineligible to vote. The bill clarifies that prosecutors can take on election-related crimes if the crime affects, or has affected two or more judicial districts. It allows the Office of the Statewide Prosecutor to charge individuals with election-related crimes. The bill resulted in opposition from Democrats who question the need for a statewide prosecutor when elected state attorneys can handle the cases.

Transportation of Unauthorized Immigrants

In the wake of a lawsuit against the Governor's decision to charter a migrant flight that did not originate in Florida, HB 6B Transportation of Unauthorized Aliens was signed into law. This bill created the Unauthorized Alien Transport Program to facilitate the transport of suspected illegal aliens throughout the United States. The bill also clarifies previous legislation by adding that flights could move people from anywhere in the country.

Name, Image, and Likeness of College Athletes

With the NCAA now allowing collegiate athletes to be paid for their name, image, and likeness, recruitment of athletes has become increasingly competitive across the country. To remain competitive with California, Texas, and other states, HB 7B Intercollegiate Compensation and Rights was passed during the special session.

The bill relaxes rules on compensating intercollegiate athletes for their name, image, and likeness. It allows Florida Universities to assist intercollegiate athletes in earning compensation or finding professional representation. These changes will meet the status quo of recruitment nationwide and retain Florida's competitiveness in recruiting. Teams and coaches still must follow NCAA rules, which ban pay-for-play deals, paying players directly, and using NIL offers as recruiting or retention inducements.

The bill also requires schools to add a second workshop for athletes on financial literacy, entrepreneurship, and life skills. It also protects teams and coaches from a liability standpoint if their coaching decisions affect that player's NIL deals.

Special Sessions

The Disney Bill

The last piece of legislation to come out of Special Session B was HB 9B Reedy Creek Improvement District, Orange, and Osceola Counties. This bill came as a result of the ongoing feud between Governor DeSantis and Walt Disney World. The dispute began last year when lawmakers voted to abolish the district when the company publicly opposed legislation aimed at prohibiting instruction about sexuality and gender issues in schools. However, the proposal failed to specify who would take over services provided to Disney World or who would assume its \$1 billion in debt.

The bill clarifies that a new district would be created within two years and specified that Orange and Osceola counties wouldn't be responsible for Reedy Creek's debt. The bill makes extensive revisions to the original Reedy Creek Improvement District Charter. Changes include renaming the district to the Central Florida Tourism Oversight District, replacing the landowner-elected board with a five-person board elected by the Governor, and revising powers given to the district.

LEGISLATION THAT PASSED

The Highlights

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No family should ever have to choose between a pay raise and their children's health care, so we will make it easier for moms and dads to move from welfare to work and on the way to their American Dream.

- Speaker Paul Renner

”

Passed Legislation

Education

Universal school choice, partisan school board elections, regulations on instructional materials, expanding parental rights, and bathroom restrictions were key education issues addressed in the Legislature this year. A key element of the Governor and legislative leadership's education agenda was diversity programs taught in higher education institutions. This topic faced extensive debate both among legislators and during public testimony and also garnered national media attention.

With Governor DeSantis preparing for a presidential run, the Governor's 'Anti-Woke' agenda was one of his main drivers on state policy, and he is expected to use these legislative wins as a success story to be replicated nationwide during his presidential campaign.

HB 1 School Choice by Rep. Plasencia and Sen. Simon

Florida continued its trend of being a national leader in educational freedom and educational choice by passing the Universal School Choice bill. The bill expands eligibility for Florida's school choice scholarships—specifically the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship and the Family Empowerment Scholarship—to all students who are residents of Florida and eligible to enroll in kindergarten through grade 12 in a public school by removing financial eligibility restrictions and enrollment caps. Florida's school choice scholarships allow parents of a student to register and attend private schools that may better serve a particular student's need or provide educational options for students with disabilities. Opponents of the bill fear the potential impact on traditional public schools and unclear cost estimates for the program. The legislature is unclear on how many students will enroll in the program, but an additional \$350 million has been put in the budget for the program.

HB 1537 Education by Rep. Daniels, Rep. Rizo and Sen. Avila

The bill updates and streamlines Florida's teacher preparation programs by expanding eligibility for temporary teaching certificates and narrowing certain general knowledge test requirements for professional certification. The bill also allows students to take the Classic Learning Test (CLT) for Bright Futures Scholarship Program eligibility, among other modifications to instruction, progression, assessment and accountability.

Passed Legislation

Education

HB 1035 K-12 Teachers by Rep. Gonzalez-Pittman and Sen. Calatayud

The bill establishes a “Teacher Bill of Rights,” which catalogs a number of rights that are currently guaranteed in law regarding employment, continuing education, controlling the classroom, directing classroom instruction, and receiving timely assessment dates. It creates a new pathway for teachers to report if they believe a school district has directed them to violate state law. In addition, the bill addresses teacher recruitment and retention through the creation of the Dual Enrollment Educator Scholarship Program and the Teacher Apprenticeship Program.

HB 379 Technology in K-12 Public Schools by Rep. Yeager and Sen. Burgess

The bill addresses the negative impact of social media on students. It requires public schools to provide age-appropriate instruction for students in grades 6-12 on the social, emotional, and physical effects of social media, and it specifies that district school boards must provide and adopt an Internet safety policy. The bill prohibits using social media on district-provided internet or using wireless communication devices during instruction time unless it is for educational purposes. The use of TikTok in schools is completely prohibited.

HB 1069 Child Protection in Public Schools by Rep. McClain and Sen. Yarborough

The bill requires educational institutions to use age- and developmentally-appropriate instruction regarding health and reproductive education for all students in prekindergarten through grade 12. The bill expands upon the “Don’t Say Gay bill” by extending the prohibition on classroom instruction on sexual orientation or gender identity through grade 8. The bill also prohibits district school boards from imposing or enforcing requirements that personnel or students be referenced with pronouns that do not correspond with biological sex as defined in the bill, and it expands parental rights by enhancing the ability of parents to challenge instructional materials.

HB 447 Term Limits for District School Board Members by Rep. Rizo and Sen. Ingoglia

The bill reduces the term limit for school board members from 12 to 8 years.

Passed Legislation

Education

HB 31 Partisan Elections for Members of School Boards by Rep. Roach and Sen. Gruters

The joint resolution proposes an amendment to the Florida Constitution that would require members of a district school board to be elected in a partisan race. The Florida voters will either accept or reject the amendment during the next general election in November 2024. If approved by at least 60% of the electors voting, members of district school boards will begin being elected on a partisan basis in the November 2026 general election.

SB 266 Higher Education by Sen. Grall and Rep. Andrade

The bill follows the trend of pushing an 'anti-woke' agenda by creating additional restrictions on public education institution spending related to diversity programs. Educational institutions are prohibited from expenditures on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs, activities, and social and political activism. The bill creates exceptions for student organizations, compliance with the law, accreditation, and access programs.

The bill also prohibits material in general education courses that violates the Florida Educational Equity Act (FEEA), or that is based on theories that systemic racism, sexism, oppression, or privilege are inherent in the institutions of the United States and were created to maintain social, political, or economic inequities. The State Board of Education or Board of Governors will review material in higher-level or elective courses. The final iteration of the bill is less prescriptive than the original version with regard to restrictions on majors, minors, and curriculum. A provision authorizing post-tenure review at any time for cause, was also removed.

HB 1521 Safety in Private Spaces Act by Rep. Plakon and Sen. Grall

The bill requires public and private sector-covered entities that maintain a restroom or changing facility to have separate restrooms for males and females or a unisex restroom or changing facility. Under the bill, covered entities include state and local public buildings, educational institutions, correctional institutions, juvenile institutions, and detention facilities. A violation of the act constitutes an offense of trespass and authorizes the Attorney General to seek injunctive relief and impose fines up to \$10,000. Opponents of the bill question how this is to be enforced, fearing genital searches and persecution in bathrooms.

Passed Legislation

Education

HB 7039 Student Outcomes by Rep. Trabulsy and Sen. Calatayud

This bill changes the state's progress monitoring system for students struggling in mathematics and reading. It specifies that reading instruction, materials, curriculum, and practices must be grounded in the science of reading. It ensures Florida's Voluntary Pre-kindergarten courses in emergent literacy correlate with educational standards in kindergarten through grade 12. The bill also creates a framework through which to identify and intervene with students struggling in mathematics.

SB 240 Education by Sen. Hutson and Rep. Melo

The bill re-vitalizes the career and technical education (CTE) program and other workforce education programs by providing support to district school boards, Florida College System institutions, and other stakeholders. The bill provides \$100 million for district school boards and colleges to fund and expand CTE programs for secondary students. It requires district school boards to provide all students enrolled in grades 9 through 12 with at least one work-based learning opportunity. The bill establishes regional education and industry consortia to meet and report to local workforce development boards the most effective ways to grow, retain, and attract talent. This bill hopes to strengthen Florida's position as a national leader in higher education and workforce development.

HB 891 Year-Round School Pilot Program by Rep. Williams and Sen. Stewart

The bill establishes the Year-Round School Pilot Program to enable the Department of Education to assist school districts in establishing a year-round school program within at least one elementary school in the district to study issues, benefits, and scheduling options. The program begins in the 2024-2025 school year for a period of four years.

HB 443 Education by Rep. Valdes and Sen. Burgess

The bill requires the Department of Children and Families to report on training requirements and coursework offered to childcare personnel. The bill clarifies the requirements for a childcare provider to gain or maintain its Gold Seal Quality Care Provider status. The bill also includes provisions relating to enrollment and operation of charter schools.

Passed Legislation

Healthcare

While healthcare policy was not initially a top priority of the Speaker or President, it became a key issue early on in the session when the DeSantis administration prioritized PBM reform. After years of small wins in the PBM reform fight, Florida passed their first significant reform bill during the 2023 legislative session. In addition to PBM's, changes to the KidCare program and tighter restrictions on abortion were front and center. One of Speaker Renner's priorities, expanding access to KidCare, was achieved through both budget and policy work approved by lawmakers.

With the Governor's imminent presidential announcement looming over the session, members also approved an abortion ban after 6 weeks. President Passidomo was not initially supportive of this measure; however, she was able to negotiate exemptions onto the ultimately successful bill.

SB 300 Pregnancy and Parenting Support by Sen. Grall and Rep Persons-Mulicka

This bill prohibits a person from having an abortion after six weeks. The bill does allow exceptions in the case of rape, incest, or human trafficking.

HB 121 Florida Kidcare Program Eligibility By Rep. Bartleman and Rep. Trabulsy

This bill expands eligibility for the KidCare program, which supplies affordable health and dental insurance for children. The proposal is designed to address fiscal cliff issues relating to the program. Currently, if a family's income surpasses the eligibility threshold by one dollar, they go from paying a \$20/month premium for the family to \$260/child – an 1100% increase. This proposal would help create a glide path instead of a steep drop-off.

The first year of implementation requires income eligibility to increase to 300% FPL as of January 2, 2024, without a phase-in. In addition, the bill directs the Florida Healthy Kids Corporation (Corporation) to set up new monthly premiums for enrollees in households over 150% FPL. The Corporation must also create new premiums in at least three, but no more than six, income-based tiers.

Passed Legislation

Healthcare

SB 254 Treatments for Sex Reassignment by Sen. Yarborough

This bill requires that a physician administer gender affirming care to adult patients in person, barring the use of telehealth and other health care workers, like nurse practitioners and physicians' assistants, to begin care. Doctors who violate those sections could face a first-degree misdemeanor. This bill would grant Florida courts temporary emergency jurisdiction if a child present in the state has been abandoned. People under 18 can no longer receive gender-affirming care unless they qualify for an exception.

HB 1239 Nursing Homes by Rep. Melo and Sen. Albritton

Requires nursing homes to provide each resident with two hours of care from a certified nursing assistant daily – a 30-minute reduction in the amount of care each resident must currently receive. The bill does not change the overall number of hours – 3.6 – that facility staff must spend caring for patients every day. But it changes who can provide them. The remaining hours of care a resident must receive could now be provided by other types of “direct care” workers – such as physical therapists, activities staff, and feeding assistants.

SB 612 Blood Clot and Pulmonary Embolism Policy Workgroup by Sen. Yarborough

This bill creates the “Emily Adkins Prevention Act” and establishes a blood clot and pulmonary embolism policy workgroup composed of health care providers, patients who have experienced blood clots, family members of patients who have died from blood clots, advocates, and other interested parties and associations.

SB 1550 Prescription Drugs by Sen. Brodeur and Rep. Chaney

This comprehensive legislation is the first in the state of Florida to reform Pharmacy Benefit Managers (PBM) and set up a PMB regulatory structure to increase accountability and transparency in prescription drug prices across the state. Specifically, the Prescription Drug Reform Act bans clawbacks, prohibits mail order mandates, bans spread pricing, outlaws steering, stops data sharing without the patient’s consent, and bans affiliate-only networks. The bill also requires PBMs to pass through 100% of all rebates received from Big Pharma to reduce customer costs. In addition to the cost savings provisions, the legislation mandates PBM reporting any increase of 15% or more of the wholesale acquisition cost during the preceding 12-month period or any cumulative increase of 30% or more of the wholesale acquisition cost during the preceding 3 calendar years.

Passed Legislation

Healthcare

HB 1471 Health Care Provider Accountability by Rep. Busatta-Cabrera

The bill amends nursing home residents' rights to allow that a nursing home resident has the right to be free from sexual abuse, neglect, and exploitation.

HB 1387 Department of Health by Rep. Porras and Sen. Rodriguez

This bill changes the requirements for marijuana packaging & labeling, medical marijuana treatment center advertising, & medical marijuana testing laboratories & employee background screening. Makes several revisions to statutes governing the DOH medical marijuana program, including: This bill also updates filing requirements and makes several revisions to statutes governing EMTs and paramedics.

HB 783 Opioid Abatement by Rep. Caruso and Sen. Boyd

This bill creates the Statewide Council on Opioid Abatement Council, for the purpose of enhancing the development and coordination of state and local efforts to combat the opioid epidemic and to support the victims of the opioid crisis and their families.

HB 387 Medical Use of Marijuana by Rep. Roach

This bill allows a physician to conduct an examination by telehealth for a patient's medical marijuana certification renewal. The bill also allows the Department of Health to suspend a physician's registration with the medical marijuana use registry for a period of up to two years if the physician fails to comply with the provisions of that statutory section or provides, advertises, or markets telehealth services before July 1, 2023.

HB 299 Education and Training For Alzheimer's Disease and Related Forms of Dementia by Rep. Black and Rep. Salzman

This bill requires the DEA to offer education about Alzheimer's disease & related forms of dementia to general public. It also requires employees of covered providers, nursing home, assisted living facility, adult family-care home, or adult day care center to complete specified training. authorizes completed training hours to count toward preservice orientation, other required training, or continuing education hours.

Passed Legislation

Healthcare

SB 914 Suicide Prevention by Sen. Garcia and Rep. Trabulsy

The bill allows first responders to serve as a first responder peer if they have experience working as or with a first responder. In addition, the bill permits the diagnosis of PTSD in first responders via telehealth for the purposes of obtaining worker's compensation benefits. Another section of the bill requires the Commission on Mental Health and Substance Abuse to study services and programs related to suicide prevention.

HB 825 Assault or Battery on Hospital Personnel by Rep. Berfield

This bill reclassifies the degree of offense when an individual knowingly commits assault or battery against hospital personnel while that person is engaged in the lawful performance of their workplace duties.

SB 1580 Protections of Medical Conscience by Sen. Trumbull

The bill allows that a health care provider or payor has the right to opt-out of participation in or payment for a health care service on the basis of a conscience-based objection (CBO). The bill prohibits health care providers from being discriminated against or suffering adverse action for declining to participate in a health care service based on a CBO. The bill also allows health care providers or payors to file complaints of violations to the Attorney General (AG) and authorizes the AG to bring a civil action for appropriate relief.

HB 635 Dental Services for Veterans by Rep. Maney and Sen. Burgess

The bill sets up the Veterans Dental Care Grant Program within the Florida Department of Veterans Affairs and would supply veterans the opportunity to access routine dental care.

HB 267 Telehealth Practice Standards by Rep. Fabricio and Sen. Boyd

The bill revises the definition of "telehealth" to include the use of audio-only telephone calls. Under current law, telehealth via a telephone call is not allowed. The bill does not affect whether health insurers will reimburse health care practitioners for services provided via telephone calls; however, coverage of this type of telehealth can be part of contract negotiations between private insurers and health care providers.

Passed Legislation

Child Welfare

SB 204 Task Force on the Monitoring of Children in Out-of-Home Care by Sen. Rouson and Rep. Williams

The bill creates a Task Force to identify and counter the root causes of why children go missing while in out-of-home care and to ensure that prompt and effective action is taken to address such causes. The task force must examine and recommend improvements to current policy, procedures, programs, and initiatives to prevent children from going missing while in out-of-home care and to ensure children who are missing are found.

SB 130 Domestic Violence by Sen. Berman and Rep. Cassel

The bill, titled “Greyson’s Law”, is named for Greyson Kessler, a 4-year old boy killed by his father in a murder-suicide in 2021. Ali Kessler, Greyson’s mother, sought a restraining order from the boy’s father after repeatedly receiving threats and being stalked. Kessler fought for exclusive custody of her son, knowing his life was in danger, but Florida’s current custody rules and definition of domestic violence slowed the process until it was too late.

The bill refines descriptions of what constitutes evidence or risks of domestic violence for use in child custody determinations by expanding the list of factors a court must consider when deciding whether shared parental responsibility would be detrimental to a child. These changes come after the continued efforts of Ali Kessler and the support of the entire legislature.

SB 272 The Nancy C. Detert Champion for Children Act by Sen. Garcia and Rep. Tramont

The bill enhances support for children and young adults who are currently or have formerly been in out-of-home care. The establishment of the Office of the Children’s Ombudsman to receive complaints from children or young adults about placement and to be a resource for children, young adults and caregivers. The bill also expands eligibility for the Keys program which helps to remove barriers for children in foster care from getting their Driver’s license.

SB 1064 Trauma Screening for Children Removed from Caregivers by Sen. Yarborough and Rep. Borrero

The bill adds a trauma screen into the assessment of a child after they are removed from his or her home.

Passed Legislation

Transportation & Economic Development

SB 102 Housing by Sen. Calatayud

This bill appropriates \$711 million for housing projects through the Florida Housing and Finance Corporation (FHFC), the largest investment in housing ever in state history. This bill increases the borrowing limit per loan to \$35,000, expands eligibility for the Job Growth Grant Fund to authorize public infrastructure projects that support housing, and creates a new tax donation program to allow corporations to direct certain tax payments to help fund housing programs.

HB 5 Economic Programs by Rep. Esposito

This bill eliminates Enterprise Florida, Inc. (EFI), and provides that all duties, functions, records, existing contracts, administrative authority, and unexpended balances of appropriations and allocations relating to the programs in EFI are transferred by a type two transfer to the Department of Commerce, which the bill creates by the renaming of the Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO). The bill repealed several obsolete or expired economic development incentive programs. The bill also renames the department's Division of Strategic Business Development as the Division of Economic Development and eliminates the Film Advisory Council.

HB 425 Department of Transportation by Rep. Andrade and Rep. Esposito

This bill authorizes installation of automated license plate recognition systems within the rights-of-way of the State Highway System. This bill also authorizes the FDOT to fund up to 100 percent of project costs for eligible intermodal logistics center projects in rural areas of opportunity and, to fund up to 100 percent of eligible project costs for specified projects at certain publicly owned, publicly operated airports located in a rural community.

HB 1397 Regional Transportation Planning by Rep. McClure and Sen. Burgess

The bill directs the Florida Department of Transportation to conduct a study reviewing aspects of Hillsborough Area Regional Transit Authority organizational structure and operation. The bill requires the FDOT to submit a report detailing the results of the study to the Governor, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives by January 1, 2024.

Passed Legislation

Transportation & Economic Development

HB 155 Tampa Bay Area Regional Transit Authority by Rep. Holcomb

This bill dissolves the Tampa Bay Area Regional Transit Authority.

HB 657 Enforcement of School Zone Speed Limits by Rep. Koster

This bill authorizes a county or municipality to enforce speed limit in school zone through a speed detection system.

SB 766 Enforcement of School Bus Passing Infractions by Sen. Burgess

This bill authorizes a school district to install and maintain school bus infraction detection systems. The school district may contract with a private vendor or manufacturer to provide a school bus infraction detection system on each school bus in its fleet.

Passed Legislation

Government

SB 7050 Elections by Sen. Hutson

The Legislature passed a wide-ranging election bill aimed at tweaking some of the details related to voter registration and the process of elections. The bill notably includes a resign-to-run provision that clarifies that Gov. Ron DeSantis can continue to serve as governor while running for president rather than having to first resign from office. The bill also includes the imposition of large fines for voter registration groups that fail to submit registration applications in time, new requirements for additional information to be included on voter registration cards, and clarifications of situations in which provisional ballots must be cast.

SB 1718 Immigration by Sen. Ingoglia

The bill requires private employers with 25 or more employees to use the E-Verify system for new employees and expands penalties for employers who fail to comply with E-Verify requirements. Penalties include possible suspension and revocation of employer licenses and imposing specific penalties on employers knowingly employing illegal aliens.

The bill criminalizes punishments for unauthorized aliens who utilize IDs. Unauthorized aliens knowingly using a false ID document to gain employment will now be charged with a third-degree felony. Counties and municipalities are now prohibited from providing funds to any person or organization for the purposes of providing documents to illegal aliens. The bill no longer permits illegal aliens to use out-of-state driver licenses and prohibits them from operating a motor vehicle.

The bill enhances criminal penalties for those caught engaging in the human smuggling of illegal immigrants and makes human smuggling a second-degree felony. The bill requires hospitals accepting Medicaid to collect data on the citizenship status of patients and report to the Agency of Health Care Administration (AHCA). The bill also provides a \$12 million nonrecurring appropriation to the Unauthorized Alien Transport Program.

Passed Legislation

Government

HB 3 Government and Corporate activism by Rep. Rommel and Rep. Sirois

The bill bars fund managers who invest state and local government-held money from considering “environmental, social, governance,” or ESG factors when choosing investments. The bill follows the Governor, Attorney General, and Chief Financial Officer’s decision for the State Board of Administration to invest funds of the Florida Retirement System Benefit Plan to prioritize the highest returns without considering ESG factors.

The Bill expands the directive to cover all funds invested by state and local governments, including general revenue, trusts dedicated to specific purposes, money held by retirement plans, and surplus funds. The bill also will prohibit banks and other financial institutions from using “social credit scoring” in deciding whether to offer customers loans or other banking services.

SB 360 Causes of Action Based on Improvements to Real Property by Sen. Hutson and Rep. Snyder

The bill reduces the time period for property owners to discover potential construction defects and bring causes of action against builders. The bill requires the 4-year statute of limitations to begin at the earliest occupancy date. The bill also reduces the statute of repose from ten to seven years. The bill seeks to create a friendly environment for builders and other construction initiatives and reduce legal action against builders.

SB 256 Paycheck Protection Act by Sen. Ingolia

The bill creates several new requirements of the unions that represent public employees in public bargaining. Employees who wish to join a certain employee organization will be required to sign a membership authorization form. The bill requires certain employee organizations to allow a member to revoke their membership at any time without reason and imposes certain requirements for bargaining agents.

The bill prevents employee organizations from receiving their members’ dues and assessments via salary reduction from the members’ public employer. Employee organization's annual financial reports will be required to be audited by an independent certified public accountant.

Vetoed Bills

On June 2, 2023, Governor DeSantis vetoed two bills from the 2023 Legislative Session. These include a measure that would have added restrictions on titles used by medical professionals and required practitioners to wear name tags or display licenses when treating patients, and a bill conforming Florida law to an interstate professional counselors compact. Governor DeSantis did not issue an explanation as to why he vetoed either of the bills.

HB385 Professional Counselors Licensure Compact **VETOED**

The bill would have clarified language giving states the discretion to collect fees within the Professional Counselors Licensure Compact. The initiative would have conformed Florida law to the terms of the compact, which became active last year and currently has 17 member states participating. The compact is designed to allow professional counselors to work across state lines without the need for multiple licenses. Florida joined the compact in 2022. There were some concerns that without specific language conforming to the compact, Florida may not be able to participate.

SB 230 Health Care Practitioner Titles and Designations **VETOED**

The bill was intended to regulate the titles and professional designations used by healthcare practitioners in their advertising. It would have applied the title or designation of "physician" only to medical doctors and osteopathic physicians for advertisements or when dealing with patients. The bill would also have required practitioners to wear name tags or display licenses when treating patients. There is a long-running debate over whether to allow optometrists to call themselves physicians, but the Senate held out against that provision, which was stripped from the bill in the final days of the recent legislative session. Nearly 50 occupations were approved to refer to themselves as "physicians," including dentists, chiropractic physicians, and podiatrists. SB 230 was a priority bill of Senate President Kathleen Passidomo.

Legislation That Failed to Pass

Expanding Scope of Defamation Lawsuits

The highest-profile bill that DeSantis didn't get across the finish line was SB 1220 - Defamation, aimed at lowering the standard for defamation lawsuits under state law. He had been jockeying for the legislation amid his continued feud with the media. The Governor publicly stated his support for such legislation in February. The bill was met with resistance, particularly from right-wing media outlets, religious organizations and business groups who warned that the bill could be used against them. The bill sponsor, Rep. Alex Andrade, said that he will bring the bill back with changes next year.

Regulating Vacation Rentals

Another attempt to further regulate short term vacation rentals failed to reach a resolution this session, as the two chambers couldn't agree on language. One sticking point was whether or not to give the Florida Department of Business and Professional Regulation (DBPR) sole authority to suspend a vacation rental license, and not the local government.

After the Legislature passed 2011 law prohibiting local governments from enacting any restrictions on vacation rentals, pushback from city and county officials forced the Legislature in 2014 to allow local governments to handle problems like noise, trash, and parking, but still prevented them from regulating the duration or frequency of rentals. Nearly every year since then, legislators have attempted to pass new regulations, but have failed to agree.

Hillsborough County Transportation Tax Funds

One issue that remains unresolved is the fate of approximately \$570 million that was collected from a defunct Hillsborough County transportation tax. The 1% transportation sales tax was approved by Hillsborough voters in 2018, but was then struck down by the Florida Supreme Court in 2021. A subsequent circuit court ruling gave the Legislature authority to determine how the funds will be utilized. During the 2023 Session, multiple plans were put forward; the Governor and the Senate proposed similar refund processes, with any remaining funds earmarked for transportation projects in the County. The House, on the other hand, included a sales tax holiday in their tax package that would continue until the funds are exhausted. The chambers were ultimately unable to reach an agreement. Tampa Bay's business community continues to advocate for the funding to be used for transportation priorities in Hillsborough. This matter is expected to be revisited, potentially during next year's session.

Legislation That Failed to Pass

In-state Tuition for "Dreamers"

One of the very few policy changes sought by Governor DeSantis that did not make it across the finish line this session was eliminating in-state tuition benefits for certain undocumented students. Florida is currently one of 23 states that requires out-of-state tuition costs to be waived for undocumented students who came to the U.S. as children and graduated from a high school in the state. The Governor's proposal would have repealed these protections, which were originally part of a 2014 state law signed by former Governor Rick Scott. This idea was met with bipartisan resistance in both chambers, and the provision was not included in the immigration package that ultimately passed the Legislature.

Raising the Age to Purchase Firearms

While gun rights activists in Florida celebrated this session over the passage of permitless carry, they didn't get everything on their wishlist. A bill lowering the purchase age for rifles and other "long guns" from 21 to 18 died in the Senate after passing the House. Republican Senate President Kathleen Passidomo opposed it and no one in her chamber would carry a companion bill. Further, the federal appellate court that covers Florida decided that requiring a buyer of long guns to be at least 21 is constitutional.

Tax Credits for Employer-Provided Child Care

HB 1021/SB 990 by Representative Fiona McFarland and Senator Erin Grall was designed, in part, to help encourage Florida businesses to provide child care services to their employees by introducing a new tax credit, which could be applied to any tax a business pays in the state. The credit could cover either 50% of startup costs for an on-site facility, or 100% of child care payments made to an outside child care facility, up to \$3,600 per child per year. While some elements of the bill relating to child care licensing and VPK accountability were included in another piece of legislation (HB 443), the tax credit provision did not pass.

Certificates of Completion

A Florida high school student who earns the required credits for a standard high school diploma, but fails to pass the required statewide assessments or achieve a 2.0 GPA, must be awarded a certificate of completion. However, a student may elect to remain in high school for up to one additional year and receive special instruction designed to remedy his or her identified deficiencies. HB 445/SB 1168, by Representative Susan Valdes and Senator Alexis Calatayud, would have required school districts to provide written notification to parents and students about the latter option. It also would have provided districts with an additional 0.5 FTE per student to help pay for special instruction, and it required the student's certified school counselor or other school personnel to inform the student of opportunities to continue his or her education through eligible postsecondary, workforce, or adult education programs. Although the bill got a hearing in the House, it failed to gain traction in the Senate.

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