



# LEGISLATIVE BULLETIN

January 15, 2021

## First Committee Week of the 2021 Legislative Session

This week kicked off the first committee week of the 2021 Legislative Session as Legislators gathered in the State Capitol. Committee meetings met on Monday, January 11th through Thursday, January 14th. The week focused on updates from the last session legislation, expert testimony in subject areas, and discussed important COVID-19 updates including Florida's vaccination status and two COVID-19 related bills, liability protections (HB7), and penalizing fraudulent activity (HB9).

Due to COVID-19, both the House and Senate have revised their rules on Committee procedures. Speaker Sprowls and President Simpson's rules are summarized below.

*Committee meetings will be held on the weeks of January 11th and 25th, and February 1st, 8th, and 15th. During committee weeks, the House and Senate will notice meetings seven days in advance with a full agenda of bills and topics to be discussed.*

*All members of the House and Senate and Staff will be tested for COVID-19 prior to committee week commitments.*

## HOUSE RULES

**Schedule:** The House plans on splitting committee blocks into two and implementing an alternating meeting schedule. Therefore, half of the committees and subcommittees will meet over a two-day period (rather than the traditional four days of meetings). The remaining committees will meet on the January 25th committee week for two days. This block schedule will repeat for committee weeks in February.

**Meeting Spaces:** The House will limit committee meetings to Webster Hall, Morris Hall, Reed Hall, and Sumner Hall. All meetings will be livestreamed on the Florida Channel. Audience seating in committees will have limited space and be socially distanced. Seating in committees will be open first-come-first served.

**Testimony:** There will be an online registration system found on the Florida House Website open to the public (including lobbyists) wishing to provide substantive testimony. To provide in-person testimony, you must complete an electronic committee appearance record no later than three hours before the start of a committee. Registration is available online once a committee

Those who do not wish to provide substantive testimony should not register for audience seating and can waive in support or opposition on legislation online via the electronic committee appearance record.

Meetings that are not open to public testimony, will be limited to House members, invited speakers, and press. If you are unable to provide testimony in person, written testimony to committee members will be allowed.

**COVID Procedures:** There will be one-hour breaks in between committee meetings for rooms to be disinfected. All public attendees will be required to socially distance and wear a face mask covering. Those exhibiting COVID symptoms, in quarantine or recently diagnosed, will not be allowed in House spaces.

**In-person Meetings:** Conference calls or virtual meetings with House members or House staff are encouraged. If an in-person meeting is necessary, space will be limited to two guests (Member office) and one guest (Staff office) with appointment only.

is noticed. Electronic committee appearance records can be found at Florida House website under House Meetings and Session Section and on each committee/subcommittee webpage. There will be additional rooms for on-site virtual testimony and committees will include those room numbers. Those registered to provide in-person testimony do not need to print their appearance record, instead they may pick up a pass with valid identity card at the new Legislative Welcome Center on the 4th floor of the Capitol two hours before committee start. If seating capacity is reached, written testimony will be available on the online electronic appearance record.

For more information, access Speaker Sprowls' memos below.

COVID-19 Protocols for January & February 2021 Committee Weeks

January & February Committee Meeting Protocols – Additional Information

## SENATE RULES

**Schedule:** There will be no more than three committee meetings at a time.

**Testimony:** The Senate reserved three remote viewing rooms at the Leon County Civic Center (505 W. Pensacola St), for the public to view meetings and provide testimony. The Senate calendar includes the room number within the Civic Center to virtually address the committee, committee rooms will be in 412 Knott, 110 SB, and 37 SB. Appearance cards will be available on site at the Civic Center, and appearance cards will be delivered to each committee room. In-person committee viewing is limited to those invited to present information, expert testimony, and press.

**In-person Meetings:** In January, Senators are asked to avoid in-person meetings and will schedule meetings virtually.

For more information, President Simpson's memo can be found below.

Donald L. Tucker Civic Center Map and Details

Public Testimony Protocols for 2021 Interim Committee Weeks

**IN A HURRY?** 

Click [here](#) to listen to this week's Legislative Review: all of the same legislative updates, faster and easier than ever before!



## COVID-19 AD HOC

### ***COVID-19 Liability Protections Bill Passes First House Subcommittee***

[HB 7-Civil Liability for Damages Relating to COVID-19](#) by Rep. McClure was heard in its first committee stop on Wednesday, in the House Civil Justice and Property Rights Subcommittee. HB 7 gives COVID-19-related liability protections for businesses, educational institutions, government entities, religious organizations, and other identified entities. Under the bill, a covered entity that makes a “good faith” effort to substantially comply with applicable COVID-19 guidance is immune from civil liability from a COVID-19-related civil action. The bill also provides that for any COVID-19-related civil action against a covered entity, a plaintiff must:

- Plead his or her complaint with particularity
- Submit, at the time of filing suit, a physician's affidavit confirming the physician's belief that the



plaintiff's COVID-19-related injury occurred because of the defendant's conduct

- Prove, by clear and convincing evidence, that the defendant was at least grossly negligent

The liability protections in HB 7 do not apply to hospitals, assisted living facilities, and nursing homes, among other facilities and the bill has no fiscal impact on local governments at this time. Passing its first committee of reference by a vote of 11-6, the next stop is Pandemic & Public Emergencies. Senate companion, SB 72 by Sen. Brandes was referenced to its first committee, Judiciary, on Thursday. Twenty-one states currently have COVID-19 liability claim legislation, that vary widely from state to state.

## ***COVID-19 Fraud Safeguard Bill Glides through First Committee***

[HB 9-Protecting Consumers Against Fraud During a Pandemic](#) by Representative Zika was heard in its first committee on Thursday, House Pandemics & Public Emergencies. HB 9 protects fraudulent activity against COVID-19 vaccination availability and access. As vaccines have become available in Florida, this legislation will prevent the creation of websites, social media, emails, phone calls with false information as to the availability to receive the vaccine or with the intent to steal personal identification or to receive money. This bill will make these actions a third-degree felony. The bill passed unanimously and heads to its next committee, Criminal Justice & Public Safety.

## ***COVID-19 Liability Protection for Healthcare Providers Workshopped in HHS Committee***

### ***Workshop on COVID-19 Liability Protection: Healthcare Providers***

Hearing no bills this week, the House HHS Committee chaired by Rep. Colleen Burton, hosted a workshop on COVID-19 Liability Protection. The meeting featured healthcare experts that included presentations from Amanda Maggard, President/CEO of AdventHealth Zephyrhills & Dade City, Jason Goldman, M.D., Sam Brooks, National Consumer Voice for Quality Long-Term Care, Thomas Edwards, Jr. of Edwards & Ragatz, P.A., and Airamid Health Services CEO Mel Beal. COVID-19 lawsuit immunity for businesses and the impact it could have on Florida ignited a fruitful discussion putting many things into perspective in such a historic time.

## ***New Committee Established by President Simpson to Tackle COVID-19***

In response to the pandemic, Senate President Wilton Simpson has established a new committee, the Select Committee on Pandemic Preparedness and Response, to address and respond to the current issues that impact Florida's citizens. Chaired by Senator Danny Burgess, the committee convened for its inaugural meeting on Thursday morning. The meeting included a state of the pandemic presentation from Surgeon General, Scott Rivkees, M.D., followed by a hybrid panel on all things hospitals featuring former AHCA Secretary Mary Mayhew, now President/CEO of the Florida Hospital Association; Aurelio Fernandez, President; and Dr. Stanley Marks, Retired Chief Medical Officer of Memorial Healthcare System in Hollywood, FL.



# Health, Safety, & Justice

## ***Staff Director Jones gives Overview of the Florida Criminal Justice System***

Chaired by Sen. Jason Pizzo, on Thursday, the Criminal Justice Committee heard a presentation on the overview of the Florida Criminal Justice System by staff director Lauren Jones. Her presentation in detail covered everything from offense levels and representation, to the criminal punishment code, penalty

enhancements, reclassifications, and mandatory minimums. The committee has no bills under review at this time; that will change in the committee weeks ahead.

## ***Senate Hears Update on Florida Agencies***

The Senate Military and Veteran Affairs, Space, and Domestic Security heard three agency updates and presentations during its meeting on Thursday afternoon. From the Department of Veteran Affairs, Major General James S. Hartsell provided an agency overview and update. Beth Medina, Vice President, Enterprise Florida, gave remarks on the Florida Defense Task Force and the Florida Defense Alliance. Florida Division of Emergency Management Deputy Director and SERT Chief, Kevin Guthrie presented on the Regional Domestic Security Taskforce.

## ***Chair Diaz discusses Florida COVID-19 Mitigation Efforts***

In the Senate Health Policy Committee meeting, Chair Diaz led a lengthy discussion on Florida's COVID-19 Mitigation Efforts. Deputy Secretary for Health, Dr. Shamari Roberson shared progression updates from the first case identified in Florida on March 1, 2020 up to where Florida is to date with data, reports, and vaccination implementation. Acting Secretary of AHCA, Shevaun Harris followed with an agency overview and informative update on how AHCA is ensuring access to care, protecting the vulnerable population, and vaccine rollout strategies.

## ***Chair Bean Provides Budget and Committee Overview***

Senate President Pro-Temp Aaron Bean kicked off the Appropriations Subcommittee on Health and Human Services going straight to the numbers. The committee that has jurisdiction over the Agency for Health Care Administration (AHCA), Agency for Persons with Disabilities, Department of Children and Families, Department of Elder Affairs, Department of Health, and the Department of Veterans' Affairs appropriated \$39.2 billion for the 2020-21 fiscal year. Chair Bean provided a high-level committee overview, encouraged flexibility and optimism because of COVID-19 and ended with HHS Agency Head introductions and comments.

## ***Status Report on Community Development Grants and Mitigation from Florida's Recent Hurricanes***

The Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation, Tourism and Economic Development heard two presentation Wednesday. The first presentation was made by Staff Director Jennifer Hrdlicka and provided a detailed overview of the agencies and programs under the oversight of the subcommittee. The second presentation was made by Dane Eagle, the Executive Director of the Department of Economic Opportunity and provided the subcommittee an overview and status report of Community Development Block Grants for Disaster Recovery and Mitigation associated with recent hurricanes, including Hurricanes Matthew, Hermine, Irma and Michael. Of particular focus, several senators inquired about how awarded disaster recovery funds could be utilized in quicker fashion within the affected local communities. Mr. Eagle noted recovery projects are funded on a reimbursement basis; however, he committed to working with the committee's members to find ways to improve the quicker release of funds.

[Both presentations are available online here.](#)

## ***Chair Perry Highlights 10 Year Funding History***

With no bills under review this week, the Subcommittee on Criminal and Civil Justice chaired by Senator Keith Perry spent time reviewing its 10-year funding history, including the 2020-21 spending reductions, statewide crime trends, and agency profiles. Representatives from the Department of Corrections, Department of Juvenile Justice, Department of Legal Affairs, and the Department of Law Enforcement were in attendance to present legislative budget requests for FY 2021-22 and answer any questions the committee had.

### **FAC Contact:**

For additional information, please contact Tonnelle Graham at [tgraham@flcounties.com](mailto:tgraham@flcounties.com).



Water & Environmental  
**Sustainability**



## ***Senate Hears Update on Clean Waters Act***

The Environment and Natural Resources committee highlighted presentations on: SB 712 Clean Waterways Act, Septic-to-Sewer Conversion programs, Resiliency and coastal protection, and springs protection. DEP Secretary Noah Valenstein showcased implementation of SB 712 aimed to improve water quality protection by minimizing the impact of nutrient pollution through best management practices (BMPs), maximizing limited state funding through coordination, and strengthening regulatory requirements. The transfer of the state onsite sewage program from DOH to DEP will be completed by 7/1/21.

[Download the Meeting Packet](#)

## ***Resiliency Initiatives Discussed in House Environment, Agriculture, and Flooding Subcommittee***

While the public had remote audio difficulties, the Committee heard presentations on Resiliency and Mitigation projects at a state and regional level. Dr. Jennifer Jurado, the Broward County Chief Resiliency Officer and Director of the Environmental Planning and Community Resilience Division, spoke on behalf of the Southeast Florida Regional Climate Compact. Dr. Jurado recapped Regional Climate Action Plan (RCAP) Implementation and regional resiliency initiatives. Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council Director of Planning and Research Randy Deshazo highlighted the [Tampa Bay Resilience Coalition](#) and Regional Resiliency Action Plan. To date, 31 local governments from the Tampa Bay Area and Sarasota County have signed up for the Coalition. DEO addressed recent funding to the Rebuild Florida Mitigation Program which has allocated \$633 million to Florida's communities. Secretary Valenstein updated the committee on implementation of SB 178, SLIP (sea-level impact projection) Study Bill. The bill requires contractors to analyze and consider sea-level rise, increased storm hazards and flooding before beginning construction of a coastal project – when it is funded by the state. DEP is creating an online compliance tool to assist completion with SLIP requirements.

## ***Bills Filed to Honor Former Commissioner/Representative Kristin Jacobs***

On Tuesday, Representative Hunschofsky and Senator Book filed legislation (HB 217/SB 588) to honor and rename the Southeast Florida Coral Reef Ecosystem Area after former Broward County Commissioner Kristin Jacobs. Jacobs' environmental legacy can be found throughout the county, state, and federal level. Her advocacy assisted in the development of the Southeast Florida Regional Climate Compact and was appointed to the National Climate Preparedness and Resilience Task Force. In 2018, Jacobs passed the legislation creating the Southeast Florida Coral Reef Ecosystem Area which runs from Martin County to Biscayne Bay. Her dedication to protecting Florida's environmental treasures will be remembered for generations with her namesake.

### **FAC Contact:**

For additional information, please contact Jeff Scala at [jscala@fl-counties.com](mailto:jscala@fl-counties.com).



## **Community & Urban Affairs**

## ***FDOT Reports on Funding, Resiliency, and M-CORES Projects***

The Senate Transportation committee heard presentations from FDOT on: Transportation Funding in Florida, Transportation Resiliency, and an update on the Multi-use Corridors of Regional Economic Significance (M-CORES) Program. FDOT Secretary Kevin Thibault highlighted the challenges FDOT faces on funding future projects. FDOT detailed their interagency cooperation with local and federal government partners to identify risks of storms, floods, and sea level rise. FDOT resiliency policy enhances the framework for coordination, communication, and allows for the implementation of solutions to vulnerabilities. FDOT also presented a status update on the M-CORES projects emphasizing collaboration with local governments and MPOs. For the final task force reports, please click the links below:

Northern Turnpike Final  
Task Force Report

Southwest-Central  
Task Force Report

Suncoast Final Task  
Force Report

The presentation is available online [here](#).

### ***Overview of Revenue and Discussion on Budget Priorities in House Infrastructure & Tourism Appropriations Subcommittee***

The House Infrastructure and Tourism Appropriations Subcommittee heard a presentation by the Chair, Rep. Jayer Williamson, outlining the agencies under the oversight of the subcommittee and an overview of the revenue structure. There was a specific discussion of past transfers from trust funds made by the subcommittee in order to fund their budget priorities.

The presentation is available online [here](#).

#### **FAC Contact:**

For additional information, please contact Eddy Labrador at [elabrador@fl-counties.com](mailto:elabrador@fl-counties.com).



## Finance, **Tax**, & Administration

### ***Chair Trumbell Provides State Revenue Summary in House Appropriations***

The House Appropriations Committee heard a presentation Wednesday from the Chair, Rep. Jay Trumbull, that provided an overview of the subcommittee structure and the agencies subject to review by each subcommittee as well as a brief discussion of the state revenue structure and outlook.

### ***EDR Coordinator Baker “Revenues Better than Expected Despite Pandemic”***

The Senate Appropriations Committee heard a presentation Thursday updating the revenue and economic outlook for Florida. Amy Baker, the Coordinator of the Office of Economic and Demographic Research, presented how revenues have been impacted during the pandemic. The presentation outlined the state forecast for revenues from last January prior to the pandemic compared to the most recent forecast adopted by the Revenue Estimating Conference in December. While the revenue forecast adopted in December is significantly better than the forecast adopted in August, it is still well below the forecast adopted in January 2020 prior to the effect of the pandemic. The next forecast update will be in March and will form the basis of the Legislative Budget for 2021-22. Ms. Baker outlined that while the Florida economy has performed better than expected to date, there are still significant risks and drags on growth as population growth is slowing, tourists travelling by air are expected to be slow to return, and commercial real property rents and valuations are likely to drop.

Both presentations are available online [here \(House Appropriations\)](#) and [here \(Senate Appropriations\)](#).

#### **FAC Contact:**

For additional information, please contact Bob McKee at [bmckee@fl-counties.com](mailto:bmckee@fl-counties.com).



## Update on Access 67 and the **Local Government Efficiency Task Force**

### **Access 67**

Launched in December 2020, Access 67 is an initiative of the Florida Association of Counties (FAC) to implement a comprehensive approach to empowering members to develop solutions to address broadband. Sample resolutions as well as information on NACo's Test It app can be found [online here](#).



**Counties  
Connecting  
Communities**

FAC is continuing to collect information to share with the Department of Economic Opportunity and needs your help in the following areas:

- Continue to encourage your board of county commission to adopt a resolution in support of the Department of Economic Opportunity – Office of Broadband implementation efforts regarding increasing the availability and effectiveness of broadband internet throughout the state. Many counties have already adopted resolutions and FAC thanks you.
- Download NACo's Test It app. FAC strongly encourages your county to implement NACo's Test It app to provide more accurate accessibility data for future broadband deployment.
- The Florida Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO): Office of Broadband has requested critical information regarding Counties and their current status of broadband accessibility. The Office of Broadband needs the answer to the two following questions from each county:
  1. Does your county currently have a broadband accessibility plan? **(YES or No)**
  2. Please provide a "Point of Contact/Broadband Team leader" for your county that DEO and FAC will utilize to communicate future efforts and implementation plans as they work towards improving broadband access in the state of Florida. **(Name, Phone and Email Address)**

Please submit the requested information to Tiffany Henderson at [thenderson@fl-counties.com](mailto:thenderson@fl-counties.com).

### **Local Government Efficiency Task Force**

The 2020 Legislature created the Local Government Efficiency Task Force via [Ch. 2020-114](#), *Laws of Florida*. The law directs the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Governmental Accountability to provide the task force research support. The task force will review the governance structure and function of local governments and determine if changes are necessary to make such governments more efficient. The task force's final report is due by *June 1, 2021*.

FAC has been asked to provide information to the task force on local government efficiency issues. We continue to work with OPPAGA as they collect information that will assist the task force in preparing and submitting their final report. The task force will hold their second meeting on *Wednesday, January 20, 2021*.

For more information on the Local Government Efficiency Task Force please visit [here](#).

#### **FAC Contact:**

For additional information, please contact Tiffany Henderson at [thenderson@fl-counties.com](mailto:thenderson@fl-counties.com).



## Data Point #1: Vaccinating Florida's Vulnerable Population

### ***"Seniors First"***

Vaccination distribution began across Florida in mid-December. So far, the CDC indicates that 2,069,175 vaccines have been distributed across Florida, with numbers updated daily. As of January 14, 2021, 774,768 Floridians have been vaccinated, this number includes long term care facilities residents and staff, healthcare personnel with patient contact, and those over the age of 65. Governor DeSantis signed [Executive Order 20-315](#) to give these populations priority in receiving the COVID-19 vaccination.

Counties across the State are in the midst of vaccinating Florida's senior population. According to the 2019 US Census estimates, Florida ranks second highest in senior population (65+) with approximately 4,497,337 seniors or 20.9% of the total Florida population. The Florida Department of Health shows that approximately 447,778 seniors have been vaccinated



around the state, more than half of total vaccinated.

- As of 2019, Sumter county has the highest proportion of seniors (58.2%) with a population around 132,400.
- Miami Dade has the highest number of seniors, due to its large size, with around 453,729 individuals over 65.
- Seniors 65+ account for approximately 80% of all COVID-19 related deaths.

The Governor plans to continue to put seniors as the top priority and administer the vaccine at a fast pace over the next few weeks. By putting Seniors First, Florida has set a precedent among states, as the CDC plans to expand its guidelines to include 65+.

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For additional information, please contact Sara Henley at [shenley@fl-counties.com](mailto:shenley@fl-counties.com).

Percentage of Vaccinations Administered to Florida's Seniors

