

**OFFICIAL MEETING MINUTES  
OF THE  
LEGISLATIVE DELEGATION  
DELEGATION ELECTION AND PUBLIC HEARING  
PALM BEACH COUNTY, FLORIDA**

**NOVEMBER 18, 2022**

**THURSDAY  
10:00 A.M.**

**6500 CONGRESS AVENUE  
BOCA RATON, FLORIDA**

**DELEGATION MEMBERS:**

State Representative Mike Caruso, Chair  
State Senator Tina Polsky, Vice Chair  
State Senator Lori Berman  
State Representative Joseph Casello  
State Representative Jervonte Edmonds  
State Representative Peggy Gossett-Seidman  
State Senator Gayle Harrell  
State Senator Bobby Powell Jr.  
State Representative Rick Roth  
State Representative David Silvers  
State Representative Kelly Skidmore  
State Representative Emily Slosberg  
State Representative John Snyder  
State Representative Katherine Waldron

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

The chair called the meeting to order at 10:06 a.m.

**II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

Rep. Casello led the Pledge of Allegiance

**III. ROLL CALL**

**Present:** Chair Caruso, Vice Chair Polsky, Rep. Casello, Rep. Gossett-Seidman, Sen. Harrell, Rep. Rick Roth, Rep. David Silvers, Rep. Kelly Skidmore, Rep. Katherine Waldron

**Absent:** Sen. Lori Berman, Rep. Jervante Edmonds, Sen. Bobby Powell Jr., Rep. John Snyder

**COUNTY STAFF PRESENT:**

Genaya Mercado, Delegation Aide, Palm Beach County Legislative Delegation

Victoria Nowlan, Executive Director, Palm Beach County Legislative Delegation

CLERK OF THE CIRCUIT COURT & COMPTROLLER'S OFFICE STAFF PRESENT:

Danielle Freeman, Deputy Clerk

Jillian Zalewska, Deputy Clerk

**IV. WELCOME REMARKS BY:**

**A. Chair Mike Caruso, Palm Beach County Legislative Delegation (Delegation)**

Chair Caruso welcomed attendees and thanked the City of Boca Raton and Mayor Scott Singer for hosting the meeting.

**B. Scott Singer, Mayor, City of Boca Raton**

No comments were made.

**V. PRESENTATION**

Chair Caruso presented a plaque to Dr. Alina Alonso, Director of the Florida Department of Health in Palm Beach County, and thanked her for her work over the past two years.

**UNSCHEDULED ITEM**

Member self-introductions took place at this time.

**VI. DELEGATION BUSINESS**

**A. Election of Chair and Vice-Chair**

Chair Caruso solicited nominations for the office of chairperson.

Rep. Casello nominated Vice Chair Polsky, and Rep. Skidmore seconded the nomination.

**By way of a roll call vote, Vice Chair Polsky was unanimously elected as the Delegation chair.**

Chair Caruso solicited nominations for the office of vice chairperson.

Rep. Roth nominated Sen. Harrell, and Vice Chair Polsky seconded the nomination.

**By way of a roll call vote, Sen. Harrell was unanimously elected as the Delegation vice chair.**

Rep. Caruso turned the gavel over to Chair Polsky.

Chair Polsky presented a plaque to Rep. Caruso.

**B. Approval of minutes from the following meetings:**

- (i) September 2, 2021, Organizational and Public Hearing
- (ii) October 28, 2021, Local Bill and Public Hearing
- (iii) November 10, 2021
  - a. Board of County Commissioners Joint Workshop
  - b. Palm Beach County League of Cities Joint Workshop
  - c. School Board of Palm Beach County Joint Workshop

**MOTION to approve the minutes. Motion by Sen. Harrell, seconded by Rep. Roth, and carried 9-0.**

**C. Criminal Justice Commission Appointment**

Rep. Skidmore volunteered for the appointment and was unanimously approved.

**D. Announcements**

Chair Polsky stated that the local bill hearing would be held on January 12, 2023, and that deadline for submittal to the Delegation office for all local bills would be December 20, 2022, at noon.

Rep. Skidmore recognized Sen. Berman's legislative aide, Abby Ross.

Chair Polsky acknowledged City of Boca Mayor Scott Singer, who had been reelected without opposition.

Chair Polsky said that municipal elections in the City of Boca would be held in March and reminded everyone who wished to vote by mail to reregister.

**VII. CONSTITUTIONAL OFFICERS**

**A. Anne Gannon, Tax Collector, Palm Beach County**

Ms. Gannon discussed the following:

- The Tax Collector's office was responsible for collecting taxes from every entity authorized to levy taxes in Palm Beach County.

- \$5.1 billion in tax collections were projected for the current year.
- The Tax Collector's office opposed a bill challenging the procedure for issuing tax certificates and selling delinquent properties to investors.

Ms. Gannon responded to questions from the Delegation.

Rep. Roth requested that Ms. Gannon provide the exact amount by which tax collections had increased since the prior year, and Ms. Gannon agreed to submit that information to the Delegation.

## **B. Dorothy Jacks, Property Appraiser, Palm Beach County**

Ms. Jacks stated the following:

- The Property Appraiser's office valued approximately 650,000 real property parcels and approximately 50,000 tangible personal property parcels annually.
- The number of petitions objecting to valuations had not increased significantly since the prior year.
- The widow/widower's exemption increase from \$500 to \$5,000 would be implemented on January 1, 2023.
- Minor changes to the language regarding exemptions were anticipated.
- The Property Appraiser supported establishing a statewide database of vacation rentals.
- Ms. Jacks and Ms. Gannon collaborated to ensure that rental properties were not granted homestead exemptions.
- A change in the process for valuing timeshares could affect several smaller communities in Palm Beach County.
- It was requested that the Delegation speak with the Property Appraiser's office about any additional hurricane relief measures before they were approved.

Rep. Roth inquired about agricultural exemptions and the window in which the exemption could be filed.

Ms. Jacks explained that the agricultural classification was a reduction in the level at which a property was assessed. She said that the application deadline was March 1 of each year, but late applications were accepted through mid-September if the applicant had good cause.

Rep. Roth followed up with a question about the delay in approval for agricultural exemptions for individuals purchasing properties after the application deadline.

Ms. Jacks said that an application could be filed, but it would be for the following year.

Rep. Casello said that his office was interested in working with Ms. Jacks and Ms. Gannon to establish a statewide rental database. He also inquired if Ms. Jacks had discussed the project with the Realtors Association.

Ms. Jacks responded that she had not yet spoken to the Realtors Association but agreed that collaborating with realtors would be helpful.

## **VII. PRESENTERS**

(CLERK'S NOTE: Sen. Skidmore left the meeting.)

### **A. Michelle Gold, Parent, Step Up for Students**

Ms. Gold discussed the Family Empowerment Scholarship, which had allowed her to develop a customized homeschooling program to meet the needs of her two children with autism. She explained that the scholarship functioned as an educational savings account, providing flexibility in the expenditure of funds.

Ms. Gold thanked the legislature for funding the program and requested that the Delegation extend the same flexibility to families receiving the income-based scholarship.

Chair Polsky asked for additional detail about Ms. Gold's request, and Ms. Gold stated that there was a long waiting list for the program.

Chair Polsky encouraged Ms. Gold to contact the Delegation if there was a specific legislative request or proposal.

Rep. Caruso thanked Ms. Gold for her presentation.

### **B. Tom Gallagher, Children's Home Society**

Mr. Gallagher spoke about the community partnership school model, which had been implemented at two schools in Palm Beach County. He said that the four partners in the model were the school district, a nonprofit organization, a health care agency, and a local college or university. Mr. Gallagher explained that the purpose of community partnership was to allow each participating school to provide a variety of services and opportunities to students and their families. He said that the benefits of the model included higher test scores, fewer disciplinary test scores, improved teacher retention, and increased parent engagement.

Mr. Gallagher said his organization was requesting additional funds to continue implementing and expanding the community partnership school model in Palm Beach County.

Rep. Casello asked how much money was being requested, and Mr. Gallagher replied that the exact amount had not yet been determined and that the funding was renewable annually.

Sen. Harrell reminded Mr. Gallagher that sponsors were needed at the House and Senate levels for any budget bill.

### **C. Candace Lehenbauer, Founder of Tapestry Academy**

Ms. Lehenbauer discussed the home-based education program and non-traditional school directory she had established. She explained that non-traditional education blended homeschooling with in-person school attendance.

Ms. Lehenbauer said that many non-traditional educational programs were not eligible to accept Florida's income-based education choice scholarships, thereby limiting options for families. She suggested addressing this issue by having the scholarships operate as educational savings accounts. She requested that the Delegation consider extending scholarship flexibility to allow families to customize their children's education.

### **D. Renee Layman, President & CEO, Center for Child Counseling**

Ms. Layman discussed the following points:

- The Center for Child Counseling (Center) had provided support to more than 7,000 children the prior year, and there were more than 500 children waiting to receive services.
- The Center's approach was unique, incorporating prevention and early intervention, as well as utilizing a public health framework to address intergenerational trauma and adverse childhood experiences.
- The Center had recently merged with KidSafe.

In response to questions from the Delegation, Ms. Layman stated the following:

- The Center's sought to hire five mental health specialists to provide triage services to families.
- The Center partnered with the School District of Palm Beach County and provided mental health services in approximately 60 schools in the county.
- There was a limited framework for children's mental health services in Florida, but

several initiatives were being implemented in Palm Beach County.

- The Center utilized funding sources such as private insurance, Medicaid, and the Children’s Services Council.
- Clinicians at the Center provided trauma treatment to victims of human trafficking and attempted to disrupt cycles of abuse by addressing caregivers’ trauma.

**E. Christopher Courtney, PBSO – 911**

Mr. Courtney spoke about the role of 911 public safety telecommunicators and requested that dispatchers be recognized as first responders to help mitigate the stressors of the work.

Chair Polsky asked for updates to the status of the bill that had been introduced to change the designation of public safety telecommunicators.

The presenters explained that the bill had not progressed past the committee stage in the prior year and said that a sponsor was needed.

In response to a question from Chair Polsky, Mr. Courtney said that the bill reflected a statewide effort and was intended to address inadequacies in compensation, the work environment, training opportunities, and high-risk benefits in retirement.

Rep. Casello said that he would like to sponsor the bill.

In a point of order, Rep. Roth requested that the presenters provide Ms. Nowlan with the prior year’s bill and sponsor information.

Rep. Caruso inquired about the logistics of 911 dispatching services, and Mr. Courtney explained the different tasks performed by public safety telecommunicators in responding to emergency calls.

**F. Carlton Cartwright, The Dolphin’s Dream Multicultural Center Project**

Mr. Cartwright discussed his organization’s work on a veterans’ memorial project and requested sponsorship to renovate an existing facility, purchase equipment, and provide funding for personnel costs and benefits. He also said that funds would be sought in 2024 and 2025 for the construction of a state-of-the-art facility in Palm Beach County to showcase American cultural and historical contributions.

Responding to a question by Chair Polsky, Mr. Cartwright indicated that the funds would be a state appropriation request.

Chair Polsky suggested that Mr. Cartwright speak to individual members to find a sponsor.

## **G. Catherine Uden, Oceana**

Ms. Uden discussed the dangers to marine life presented by plastic bags, food containers, and other single-use plastics.

She requested that the Delegation support a reversal of the law prohibiting local state governments from enacting policies regulating the use of plastics. She also asked that the Delegation support an update of Florida's balloon release law with a repeal of preemptions.

Ms. Uden indicated that Travis Moore was the Delegation's contact in Tallahassee for Oceana.

## **H. Evan Orellana, Surfrider Foundation**

Mr. Orellana discussed the importance of clean water and said that his organization was requesting support of the Safe Waterways Act and the authority of the Florida Department of Health to protect the health, safety, and welfare of beachgoers.

He said that the Surfrider Foundation also wanted to improve beach water quality testing and an improved system for advisories and notices. He noted that Sen. Berman was re-filing the bill and said that his organization also supported a \$500,000 appropriation for the Florida Healthy Beaches program, which provided water testing throughout the state.

Rep. Gossett-Seidman discussed flaws in the existing process for notifying cities and municipalities about unsafe water.

Rep. Caruso expressed interest in sponsoring the bill in the House of Representatives and said that his office would follow up with Mr. Orellana.

## **VIII. PUBLIC COMMENT**

Justin Katz discussed the complexity of State rules and regulations governing teacher compensation.

Daniel Wilson spoke about the role of 911 public safety telecommunicators as first responders.

**MOTION to extend the meeting by 15 minutes. Motion by Rep. Caruso, seconded by Rep. Casello, and carried 8-0.**

Dominic Phillips spoke about Florida Statute 768.21(8), known as the "Free Kill Law."



Kay Gates discussed Everglades restoration, green energy, issues of social justice and equity, and sugar cane burning in the Glades. She also invited everyone to the Everglades Coalition Annual Conference on January 26-28, 2023, in Coral Springs. Chair Polsky asked Ms. Gates to provide information about the upcoming conference to Ms. Nowlan.

Linda Smithe informed the Delegation that there would be a virtual attendance option for the Everglades conference. She also spoke about climate change, property insurance, environmental justice, saltwater intrusion into drinking water, single-use plastics, and renewable energy.

## **IX. ADJOURNMENT**

**MOTION to adjourn. Motion by Rep. Casello.**

**At 12:04 p.m., the chair declared the meeting adjourned.**

APPROVED:

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Chair/Vice Chair