



# 2025 STATE LEGISLATIVE AGENDA



# Palm Beach County Board of County Commissioners



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**DISTRICT 7**

**County Administrator: Verdenia C. Baker**

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## **STATEMENTS OF AFFILIATIONS**

### **FLORIDA ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES**

As a member of the Florida Association of Counties (FAC), Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** the 2025 FAC Legislative Program and Guiding Principles, unless issues specifically conflict with Palm Beach County's position.

### **COUNTY COALITION FOR RESPONSIBLE MANAGEMENT OF LAKE OKEECHOBEE**

As a member, Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** the 2025 State Legislative Priorities of the 16 County Coalition for Responsible Management of Lake Okeechobee, unless issues specifically conflict with Palm Beach County's position.

### **SOUTHEAST FLORIDA REGIONAL CLIMATE CHANGE COMPACT**

As a member, Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** the Southeast Florida Regional Climate Change Compact 2025 State Climate, Energy and Resilience Legislative Priorities and Principles unless issues specifically conflict with Palm Beach County's position.

## **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

### **PALM BEACH COUNTY ROAD 880**

Palm Beach County Road 880 (CR-880) is a two-lane road that constitutes approximately 18 miles stretching from the Twenty-Mile Bend into the City of Belle Glade. This roadway serves as the main mode of transport for the agricultural products yielded by the farms in the Glades region to get to distribution centers and the Port of Palm Beach, where they will eventually end up in the homes of consumers across the nation. When CR-880 was originally constructed by the State of Florida, it was built on top of the muck soil that is prevalent in the region. The instability of the muck soil beneath the road, coupled with the weight of the large trucks hauling these products out of the region year-round has accelerated the aging of this infrastructure. As a result, the roadway has fallen into a state of disrepair, necessitating its complete reconstruction. The total project cost is projected to total over \$100 million.

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** funding for the reconstruction of County Road 880, a critical farm-to-market link in the community, through the SCOP farm-to-market road program outlined in 339.2818(8), F.S..

## **GLADES REGIONAL INITIATIVES**

In an effort to provide economic growth and stimulus to the region surrounding Lake Okeechobee, Palm Beach County has identified several legislative issues that will promote economic development and job creation in the Glades Region. Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS**:

- Legislative initiatives and funding to implement components of the Glades Region Master Plan, which include:
  - Improvements to existing affordable housing units, as well as the development of new affordable housing units.
  - Stormwater improvements to enhance economic and housing development, as well as improve water quality and prevent flooding.
  - Mitigation of muck soils that result in construction cost premiums for buildings, infrastructure and roads.
- The continuation and enhancement of Small County Outreach Program (SCOP) funding for road reconstruction and repaving.
- Funding of a recurring, specific appropriation for the Small County Outreach Program to be used by local governments authorized by 339.2818(8), F.S. for project costs on county or state roads that are used primarily as farm-to-market connections between rural agricultural areas and market distribution centers.
- Funding for the Everglades Restoration Agricultural Community Employment Training Program (ERACETP).
- Eligibility changes to ERACETP to encourage greater participation from Glades area students and businesses.
- Funding for youth violence prevention programs.
- Funding to help improve infrastructure surrounding agricultural communities.
- Legislation to help farmers in their efforts to produce fruits and vegetables for our country and our community.

## **RURAL JOBS TAX CREDIT**

This existing Rural Jobs Tax Credit is provided to new or expanding employers within one of 36 qualified rural areas (including Belle Glade, Pahokee and South Bay). It is valued up to \$1,000 per new job and is good for a two-year period, plus a five-year carry-forward period. Depending on the number of current employees, an existing business has to have created at least 20 percent more jobs or 10 new employees one year prior to the date of application. No pre-approval is needed prior to the company's decision to locate in the qualified area. This credit may only be taken against the Florida Corporate Income Tax or Sales and Use Tax owed by the company to the State.

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** the enhancement of the Rural Jobs Tax Credit to:

- Remove the requirement that a minimum number of jobs be created at a new eligible business;
- Provide up to a \$2,500 tax credit for a new eligible business;
- At an existing business with less than 50 employees, provide for a 10 percent increase in the number of employees, allowing up to a \$2,000 tax credit per job created; and
- At an existing business with 50 or more employees, allow a \$1,500 tax credit per job created if the business adds at least 5 new employees.

### **FLORIDA’S FILM, TELEVISION, AND DIGITAL MEDIA**

Florida’s entertainment industry generates thousands of jobs for Florida workers, brings substantial new money to our local communities, spawns financial investment and tourism throughout the state, and can be an integral part of Florida’s economic recovery. Working alongside the Palm Beach County Tourism Development Council:

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** the Retention of Florida’s Entertainment Industry Sales Tax Exemption Program.

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** programs to retain Florida’s professionals and new graduates in these industries, thereby building the confidence to stay in Florida and move onto gainful high-skill, high-wage employment.

Palm Beach County also **SUPPORTS** the Film and Television Commission’s education initiative, The Palm Beaches Student Showcase of Films, Florida’s largest student film competition and award show.

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** the appropriation of \$500,000 to be used for targeted marketing efforts aimed at promoting Florida as a premier destination for film and media production. This request is being made due to the current absence of a state film commission dedicated to marketing Florida as a production hub, as well as the lack of a statewide incentive program to attract high-impact production projects.

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** film incentives for opioid awareness education funded through opioid settlement agreements.

### **BIOMEDICAL RESEARCH FUNDING**

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** new and recurring funding for educational programs produced by local universities and state colleges in partnership with institutions such as Max Planck and The Herbert Wertheim UF Scripps Institute for Biomedical Innovation and Technology. Biomedical research funding is beneficial to not only the residents of Palm Beach County, but to residents nationwide.

## **JOB GROWTH GRANT FUND**

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** continued funding for the Florida Job Growth Grant Fund and other incentive programs to support the development of infrastructure and workforce training related to the expansion of economic development throughout the state.

## **VISIT FLORIDA**

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** full funding for VISIT FLORIDA and removal of the agency's sunset provision.

## **EQUESTRIAN TOURISM**

From Wellington to Ocala to Pensacola, the equine industry makes a dramatic impact on the local economies hosting various multi-week events. The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services estimates that the Florida horse industry generates an annual \$6.8 billion impact on the gross domestic product of Florida, providing more than 244,000 jobs in the State. Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** promoting our equestrian industries as well as the investment of state tourism dollars for promotion of "Equine-Tourism" throughout the state.

## **ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE**

The rapid rollout of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools and the proliferation of other forms of AI has brought about new economic development and innovation opportunities. The AI landscape is constantly evolving, generating unique oversight and regulatory challenges for state legislatures across the country.

Palm Beach County will **MONITOR** legislation regarding the development, use, and regulation of artificial intelligence.

# **SUBSTANCE USE AND MENTAL HEALTH**

## **SUBSTANCE USE AND MENTAL HEALTH FUNDING**

The human and economic costs of untreated substance use and mental illness in our state continue to rise. These costs include the criminalization of people with untreated mental illnesses, family erosion, substance use, job loss, domestic violence, homelessness, medical problems, crime and suicide. Often these issues arise because of unaddressed trauma. Florida must do more to invest and fund community-based and integrated mental healthcare and trauma informed care. Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** increased funding

for the region's managing entity, the Southeast Florida Behavioral Health Network, to be utilized by care systems working collaboratively to reduce opioid use and addiction disorder, reduce suicides especially in young people, raise awareness, treat mental illness, increase efforts to prevent addiction, and create overall safer communities.

As the State of Florida receives lawsuit settlement dollars related to opioid and substance use cases, Palm Beach County encourages the state to set aside a portion of the settlement proceeds for a research and development grant program related to prevention and treatment of opioid use and addiction, including sustaining recovery treatment post-care.

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** funding efforts by the legislature for additional beds and treatment programs for mental health and substance use disorders with an emphasis on youth services and expectant mothers.

Palm Beach County also **SUPPORTS** funding efforts by the legislature for trauma informed care training, education, and treatment, mental health awareness programs to reduce stigmatization and youth suicide prevention programs.

Lastly, Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** funding efforts by the legislature for evidence-based public therapeutic recreation programs in the treatment and prevention of chronic health conditions including substance use and behavioral disorders.

### **OPIOID AND SUBSTANCE USE**

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** policy changes, as well as appropriations, to support providing life-saving interventions, medically-assisted detoxification programs, locations for expectant mothers to decrease the risk of complications and birth defects due to opioid and substance use, and diversions from the criminal justice system for those suffering from opioid addiction.

### **SOBER HOMES/STATE ATTORNEY ADDICTION RECOVERY TASK FORCE**

The Palm Beach County State Attorney Addiction Recovery Task Force was created in 2016 to monitor operation of unregulated "sober homes," prosecute fraudulent treatment and marketing practices, and recommend changes to laws and regulations for the protection of vulnerable people in recovery. In 2017, there were 642 opioid overdose deaths, according to figures released by the Palm Beach County Medical Examiner. Through efforts of the Task Force, in 2018, based on numbers from the Medical Examiner, opioid overdose deaths declined approximately 40%.

The Task Force was instrumental in the passage of landmark legislation addressing the treatment industry in 2017, and 2019-2024. These measures have certainly helped in our efforts to minimize the destructive effects of opioid use disorder as well as the fraud and abuse that had been commonplace in the industry.

Safe and supportive housing is critical in the recovery process. Operation of sober homes with no oversight or regulation can lead to, among other things, homelessness and relapse for those suffering from substance use. Fraudulent marketing and treatment practices can also have devastating effects on the lives of individuals who come to Palm Beach County for treatment. Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** the State Attorney Addiction Recovery Task Force, and their recommended statutory changes for the 2025 session.

## **HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES**

### **LIVE LOCAL ACT**

The State of Florida has seen decades of rapid population growth. The steady influx of people relocating to the state, and particularly to South Florida, has made Palm Beach County one of the fastest-growing destinations for those seeking a place to call home. However, this mass migration has depleted residential rental units leading to significant rent increases and a lack of available housing.

In 2023, the legislature adopted the Live Local Act, which provided historic state investments in affordable housing programs. This act also preempted a local government's requirements regarding zoning, density, and height to allow for streamlined development of affordable multifamily housing in commercial, industrial, and mixed-use zoned areas.

This legislation does not take into consideration that some industrial zoned land may not be appropriate for residential use due to noise and other environmental concerns. Some counties have limited vacant industrial acreage still available for economic development. In order to maintain a balance of economic development opportunities and housing availability, Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** allowing local governments to determine if affordable housing is appropriate on certain industrial zoned properties.

Palm Beach County also **SUPPORTS** state incentives for local governments that have implemented a dedicated funding source for affordable and workforce housing.

### **AFFORDABLE PROGRAM INCOME LIMITS**

The State of Florida utilizes The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Area Median Income as the basis for establishing State program income limits and affordable housing maximum rents. To calculate Area Median Income, HUD uses U.S. Census Bureau data on median *family* income. Median *family* income figures are consistently higher than median *household* income figures, and their use results in higher income limits and higher maximum rents. Median *household* income is lower than median *family* income

because family households usually earn more than non-family households do. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, *family* income typically runs 20-24% greater than *household* income in all geographies. Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** encouraging the State to review its method of calculation of Area Median Income and consider revising the methodology to use median *household* income. This adjustment would provide income limits that would more accurately reflect the population's actual median income and better serve those targeted for assistance through affordable housing programs. This would also provide added funding for those populations with the greatest need while addressing the affordable housing crises nationwide.

## **HOMELESSNESS**

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** efforts by members of the Legislature to identify and fund programs for the homeless. The County is experiencing a growing problem with homeless students, families, persons with disabilities, seniors, and veterans. The County proposes the following:

- Additional state resources allocated for use by local governments to expand access to critical services, provide housing opportunities for unsheltered residents, support street outreach teams, and comply with HB 1365 (2024) prohibiting overnight sleeping on public property.
- Repeal the ability for individuals to bring a civil action against the county under Ch. 125.0231(4)(a) F.S., or extend the effective date of its implementation to allow local governments time to provide resources and services to unhoused residents.
- Sober homes legislation that will provide options to prevent individuals who are forced to leave a home from becoming homeless.
- Full funding of the State Apartment Incentive Loan (SAIL) program from the State Housing Trust Fund.
- Funding for DCF Homeless Unified Challenge Grants that provide continuum of care wrap-around services for homelessness.
- Support mental health funding.
- Support Affordable Housing Task Force recommendations.
- Support additional funding to prevent college and university students, youth aging out of foster care, and unaccompanied minors from becoming homeless.
- Provide free or subsidized housing and food, as well as case management wrap around services.

## **EVICTION FILINGS**

Many times during the eviction process, the parties involved are able to reach a settlement agreement through mediation and the tenant's eviction is no longer pursued. However, even when a settlement is reached and an eviction is not finalized, the eviction filing remains accessible to future landlords through public records and tenant screening databases, despite not showing up on credit reports. This creates a barrier to housing for individuals who have never actually been evicted, as the mere existence of an eviction

filing can negatively impact their ability to secure future housing. Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** legislative efforts that would allow a tenant to request a court seal an eviction filing when a settlement is reached and the eviction is no longer pursued to remove this barrier to housing access.

### **MID-LEASE RENT INCREASES ON TAXPAYER-FUNDED UNITS**

The Program Income and Rent Limits for affordable housing units are updated annually, which can sometimes result in mid-lease rent increases for tenants living in multifamily units funded by state and federal agencies. This situation can lead to unexpected rent hikes that tenants hadn't prepared for, impacting them midway through their lease or in some cases only weeks after signing the original agreement. To help ensure these individuals remain housed, Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** legislation that would restrict rent increases based on these program limits to only take effect at the time of lease renewal, ensuring more predictability for tenants.

### **TRANSPORTATION DISADVANTAGED PROGRAMS**

Transportation Disadvantaged (TD) funding is an important funding source for Palm Tran, enabling Palm Beach County to provide the most economically challenged customers with public transportation when they are located outside of the fixed route service area, and to provide discounted fixed route bus passes. To maintain the existing level of services and accommodate the needs of TD residents, Palm Beach County has annually supported the TD program efforts with additional funding. This past fiscal year, the County's local contribution is \$3,810,099 of which \$333,588 is required.

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** attempts to increase the funding to the TD program and to prevent diversion of these dollars for other purposes.

### **CHILD WELFARE**

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** the Florida Coalition for Children's (FCC) request for increased funding with recurring revenue for the agencies operating Florida's system of foster care and related services. The FCC is a statewide association of community-based care (CBC) lead agencies, which includes ChildNet Palm Beach and those agencies that directly serve Florida's abused, abandoned and neglected children. Annual increases in statewide child welfare funding have not been sufficient to meet the needs of this population. There has been a notable increase in the number of teens in group residential care facilities, which has been driving up the cost of care statewide. The increased appropriation of funds will enable lead agencies and their subcontracted service providers, in Palm Beach and throughout the state, to deliver a comprehensive range of high-quality services sufficient to consistently and effectively meet the needs of Florida's expanded foster care population.

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** full funding for Guardian ad Litem (GAL) Program.

During the 2024 Legislative Session, HB 7089 repealed the existing CBC equity allocation model described in Section 409.991, F.S., and charged the Department of Children and Families (DCF) with developing a new methodology for the allocation of core service funds in collaboration with the CBCs and other child welfare services providers. DCF must submit a report to the Governor, President of the Senate, and Speaker of the House by December 1, 2024, documenting the methodology. Palm Beach County will **MONITOR** any recommended changes proposed by DCF's report to the CBC equity allocation model to ensure they facilitate a more equitable distribution of any new core funding allocated to CBC lead agencies throughout the state.

### **SENIOR WELFARE**

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** the Area Agency on Aging's legislative priorities, which includes funding to serve at-risk seniors on the Department of Elder Affairs waiting list for the Community Care for the Elderly Program, the Home Care for the Elderly Program, and the Alzheimer's Respite Care Program.

### **GUARDIANSHIP OVERSIGHT**

A 2022 report published by a task force convened by the Florida Court Clerks and Comptrollers Association found that Florida had little statewide formalized guardianship case data collection or sharing processes in place. As a result, HB 1349, Guardianship Data Transparency was passed and signed into law in 2022.

The bill required the Clerks of Court Operations Corporation (CCOC) to create a guardianship database for judicial guardianship proceedings. The database will include the guardian's discipline history, registration status, compliance with statutory qualifications, and status of statutorily required reporting. The CCOC must establish a searchable, publicly accessible webpage for specific, limited, professional guardian information, and publish monthly reports on the state's guardianship system. The bill also required the Department of Elder Affairs, which regulates public and professional guardians, to publish professional guardian registration profiles online by July 1, 2023.

To ensure the protection of those unable to care for themselves, Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** legislation that will increase transparency regarding existing guardianships in Florida and protect wards from fraud and abuse.

### **ADULTS/STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** additional funding for rate increases for services provided through the Agency for Persons with Disabilities. Currently, the rate crisis is causing many agencies to go out of business and others find it extremely difficult to attract and maintain staff.

## **DENTAL ACCESS**

In response to a need for improved dental access and affordability, multiple states have introduced legislation including Florida.

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** efforts to make dental care more affordable and accessible.

Palm Beach County continues to **SUPPORT** Palm Beach State College as they expand their dental programs and help to improve access for vulnerable populations.

## **PUBLIC RECORDS EXEMPTIONS FOR MEDICAL EXAMINER**

Pursuant to Section 119.07(1), F.S., Medical Examiner Offices in Florida are mandated to release all documents reflecting their work product as public records, to include investigative reports, autopsy reports, toxicology reports and ancillary studies, as long as the cases do not meet criteria for exemption.

The vast majority of cases in which Medical Examiner Jurisdiction is assumed fall under the non-exempted category. Autopsy reports include private information regarding an individual's life and medical history. Diagnoses that may have been made during the time the person was alive, as well as explicit personal identifiers such as tattoos, surgical and non-surgical scars, and descriptions of injuries, among other valuable personal information is included in an autopsy report. Medical records remain protected for 50 years following the death of the individual via HIPAA but that privacy status is lost when an autopsy is performed, as it becomes a public record.

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** legislation to amend Chapter 119 F.S., to provide for an exemption to withhold autopsy reports from public records to protect individual HIPAA rights and the privacy of loved ones.

## **FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH – PALM BEACH COUNTY BUILDINGS**

The Florida Department of Health (DOH) operates and maintains several service locations throughout Palm Beach County. One of these facilities, located on 45<sup>th</sup> Street, is aging and in need of parking lot repairs in addition to painting and waterproofing. Another one of these locations is in Palm Beach County's South County Administrative Complex, located in Delray Beach. The County plans to undergo a comprehensive redevelopment of the South County Administrative Complex to include a new building for the Florida Department of Health (FDOH). During the design phase of this project, the County has worked closely with FDOH to ensure the new building will meet their needs so they can continue to provide services to Palm Beach County residents.

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** funding for essential repairs to the 45<sup>th</sup> Street facility. Palm Beach County also **SUPPORTS** a partnership with the State of Florida to assist in funding the new FDOH building, which the County will begin constructing in 2027.

### **MULTICULTURAL RESOURCES CENTER**

Palm Beach County is home to a large community of diverse people representing a variety of countries. To meet the needs of this growing population the creation of a Multicultural Resources Center has been approved by the Board of County Commissioners, who have allocated \$1 million for this purpose. This location will serve as a hub for a multiplicity of services to a diversified community base. Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** the establishment of a Multicultural Resources Center to meet this critical need in our community.

## **EQUAL OPPORTUNITY**

### **PUBLIC RECORDS EXEMPTION – COMPLAINTS OF DISCRIMINATION**

Current law lists specific protected classes and specific types of discrimination that may change over time. By simplifying this language, all complaints of discrimination would be exempt, unless they fall under the remainder of the statute. Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** simplifying the public records exemption for local governments in matters of complaints of discrimination to simply “employment or places of public accommodation.”

In an effort to decrease the number of lengthy and expensive investigations, encourage the resolution of complaints of discrimination and improve the efficiency of the conciliation process, Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** exempting records of conciliation in local government’s efforts to resolve complaints relating to employment, housing, or places of public accommodation. Palm Beach County also **SUPPORTS** a public records exemption in all investigations of complaints of discrimination involving local government, until that investigation is completed.

### **LOCAL PREFERENCES**

Local preference programs hold great significance in fostering economic growth and community development at the local level. By giving preference to local businesses and contractors during county procurement opportunities, this program encourages the circulation of wealth within our community. It ensures that local businesses have a fair and equitable chance to compete and thrive, leading to increased

job opportunities, tax revenue, and overall prosperity at home and throughout the region. Moreover, the local preference program helps to strengthen our community by promoting local entrepreneurship and encouraging investment in local infrastructure. That investment, in turn, contributes to the long-term sustainability and resilience of the region. Ultimately, by prioritizing local businesses, the local preference program plays a crucial role in building strong, vibrant, and self-sufficient communities.

As recommended by the National Institute for Governmental Procurement, local procurement preferences should “be implemented only as one of several criteria in a ‘best value’ evaluation and award process. Best value means the most advantageous balance of price, quality, and performance identified through competitive procurement methods in accordance with stated selection criteria.”

Palm Beach County **OPPOSES** legislative efforts to prohibit the application of local preference as one of several criteria in a best value evaluation and award process for public works projects when the projects are funded entirely by local revenues.

## **BUDGET & TAXATION**

### **UNFUNDED MANDATES**

The State Legislature has frequently passed legislation that compels local governments to provide a service, program, or benefit without providing the appropriate funding or a funding source. This compromises local governments’ ability to provide services requested by their local communities by diverting resources to these state-directed, unfunded mandates or cost shifts. In addition, as more and more mandates are created, local governments are faced with the burden of using local tax dollars to finance functions that they have little control over.

If the state requires a local government to provide a service or a higher service, the state must do a better job of identifying costs to local governments when passing new legislation and must provide funding or a funding source for every legislative initiative that imposes a cost on counties. Palm Beach County **OPPOSES** new unfunded mandates and unfunded state to county cost shifts. Additionally, Palm Beach County **OPPOSES** any action by the state to preempt the home rule authority of local governments or to restrict local governments’ ability to levy ad valorem taxes.

### **VACATION RENTALS**

In 2011, the Florida Legislature passed HB 883, which blocked local governments from "regulating, restricting, or prohibiting" vacation rental properties. Recognizing that the 2011 legislation went too far, the Legislature passed HB 356 in 2014, restoring partial Home Rule authority to local governments. In effect, the

law allowed counties to enact certain regulations (parking, occupancy standards, and local registration), but precluded them from passing regulations that prohibited vacation rentals or limited the duration and frequency of stays.

However, in 2018, HB 773 overturned the 2014 legislation and effectively took counties back to what was enacted in 2011. The effect is that local governments have few measures to regulate these uses in a way that would maintain the character of a residential neighborhood. Over the past few years, local governments have fielded numerous complaints about the operation of vacation rentals.

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** legislation that would provide local governments with reasonable authority to help govern the operation of vacation rentals in residential neighborhoods.

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** the Palm Beach County Tax Collector's request for amendment of Section 212.03 (1)(a), F.S., regarding transient rentals tax to add vessels to the taxable list of entities renting for under six months. Currently, a number of online companies are now advertising vessels on their websites. One website has seventeen vessel rentals for rent under six months. These rentals range from \$59 to \$500 per night. This change will enable counties and municipalities to collect bed taxes consistent with other transient rentals.

Palm Beach County also **SUPPORTS** legislation that would require rental owners or operators to provide local government with contact information of a responsible party for each rental, or provide a public record exemption that would enable local governments to identify the location of each rental.

### **TOURIST DEVELOPMENT TAX**

In 2018, the use of the Tourist Development Tax (TDT) was expanded to include any related land acquisition, land improvement, design, and engineering costs required to bring public facilities into service. This includes major capital improvements that have a life expectancy of five or more years. In 2021, legislation proposing adding resilience projects to the list of permissible TDT tax uses was introduced but failed to pass. In 2023, legislation increasing the population threshold for counties authorized by law to reimburse themselves with TDT revenues for certain services was passed. This change authorizes six new counties to use TDT revenues in this way.

Palm Beach County **OPPOSES** any further expansion of the Tourist Development Tax and **SUPPORTS** maintaining TDT revenue for local tourism promotion, which supports businesses in the community, beach renourishment efforts, the arts, sporting events, people employed in the visitor industry, and quality of place for everyone.

## **ARCADES**

In 2013, the Florida Legislature passed a law clearly prohibiting adult arcades from operating slot machines or other games of chance and paying winners in cash and expensive prizes. State law also states “Arcade Amusement Centers” can only pay out non-cash prizes worth a minimum amount and are prohibited from operating games of chance, and makes it a misdemeanor to violate the statute (Sections 849.08 and 849.16, F.S.). Further, F.S. 849.16 defines illegal slot machines as machine-based games that contain “any element of chance or any other outcome unpredictable by the user.”

As arcades were closed by the Governor pursuant to COVID-19 Executive Orders, it became apparent that there was a proliferation of adult arcades that have set up shop to operate in Palm Beach County.

Arcade operators have long argued that the machines are legal under the state's "Chuck E. Cheese" law, which allows people to play games with an "application of skill" to get credits redeemable for non-cash prizes. However, local governments throughout Florida with no authority to regulate these businesses, have shut down arcades arguing that gambling equipment is a public nuisance and that they have put public safety at risk since robberies and fatal shootings have occurred at these businesses throughout the state.

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** legislation that increases the penalties for individuals that operate illegal adult arcade gaming operations.

## **INFRASTRUCTURE AND MOBILITY**

### **IMPACT, MOBILITY, AND MULTI-MODAL FEES**

Palm Beach County will **MONITOR** legislation regarding impact fees, mobility fees, and/or multi-modal fees. Palm Beach County continues to **OPPOSE** legislation that would adversely affect the county’s ability to charge and collect such fees.

### **GROWTH MANAGEMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE**

Growth management laws should take careful consideration of and protect the distinct home rule authority and land use controls of local governments. Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** changes that:

- Strengthen the intergovernmental review process.
- Ensure that the development impacts occurring outside the approving jurisdiction are adequately mitigated.

- Eliminate unnecessary duplication and expenses.
- Support full funding of regional planning councils.

Palm Beach County **OPPOSES** legislation prohibiting or restricting the ability of a regional planning council to provide planning and technical service to its local governments. Palm Beach County additionally **SUPPORTS** efforts to strengthen intergovernmental coordination so land use decisions of one jurisdiction do not negatively affect another.

Additionally, Palm Beach County **OPPOSES** legislation that preempts the legislative and policymaking powers of counties used to regulate land use, implement local zoning controls and/or fire codes, and density. Further, the County **OPPOSES** legislative efforts that mandate minimum land use densities for properties that meet specific size, use and location characteristics.

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** changes to current law to restore local government's home rule authority to deny projects based upon the proposed project's projected impact to surrounding transportation infrastructure.

To help ensure county road improvement projects are completed on time and within budget, Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** legislation that requires a utility to reimburse a local government for reasonable damages resulting from the utility's failure to remove or relocate its utility lines in the local government's rights-of-way pursuant to an approved utility work schedule. Palm Beach County also **SUPPORTS** efforts to allow local governments to make the issuance of permits for the new placement of utilities within the local government's rights-of-way contingent upon the payment of any costs incurred by the local government due to the failure of the utility owner to timely relocate utilities or for damaging existing infrastructure.

#### **FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION (FDOT) GRANT PROGRAMS**

Palm Beach County is qualified for, and has been the recipient of, various FDOT grant programs. Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** attempts to increase funding to FDOT grant programs including, but not limited to the following:

- Public Transit Service Development Program - This program provides initial funding to public transit projects with new or innovative techniques to improve system efficiencies, ridership or revenue. Palm Tran's Go Glades on-demand service was created from funding through this program.
- Transit Corridor Program - This program is designed to relieve congestion and improve capacity within an identified transportation corridor by increasing the people carrying capacity of transportation systems using high-occupancy conveyances.
- Park and Ride Lot Program - This program provides for the purchase and/or lease of private land for the construction of park and ride lots, the promotion of these lots, and the

monitoring of their use. Palm Tran has received funding from this program and would like to seek future opportunities to receive funding.

- Airport Development Grant Program - The County **SUPPORTS** state funding for airport development.

### **AIRPORT CONTRACTS**

Pursuant to changes to Chapter 332, F.S, effective October 1, 2020, a governing body of a commercial service airport may not approve purchases of contractual services in excess of the Category Five threshold amount of \$325,000 provided in Section 287.017, Florida Statutes, on a consent agenda.

In 2023, legislation was passed and signed into law that revised the threshold amount. New thresholds are set by an airport's FAA Hub Classification. Effective July 1, 2023, a governing body of a commercial service airport may not approve purchases of contractual services or commodities in excess of: \$500,000 for small hub airports, \$1 million for medium hub airports, and \$1.5 million for large hub airports.

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** legislation granting the ability to approve airport contracts on a consent agenda which includes a reasonable opportunity for public comment, as well as increasing purchasing threshold amounts.

### **NATURAL GAS FUEL REBATE PROGRAM**

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** the reinstatement of the Natural Gas Fuel Rebate Program. In 2016, \$6 million was awarded statewide. However, the Legislature has not funded the program since its expiration in 2020.

### **INDEXING LOCAL OPTION FUEL TAXES**

In aligning the state and counties with the same indexing system, indexing local option fuel taxes would allow counties to strategically fund projects from revenue generated within their county, thus allowing for a more targeted control of maintenance, development and investment. It will provide a much needed revenue source to fund transportation capital projects especially since the local gas tax is not indexed and it has lost most of its purchasing power due to inflation and increasing costs of construction.

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** indexing local option fuel taxes to annual adjustments of the Consumer Price Index.

## **RAIL TRANSPORTATION**

The Palm Beach County Board of County Commissioners remains dedicated to the goal of an integrated regional transportation system and new, dedicated funding for the South Florida Regional Transportation Authority (SFRTA) will enable Palm Beach County to use existing funds to expand and enhance its transit needs.

SFRTA is committed, if successful in obtaining a dedicated funding source, to funding millions for projects identified by Palm Beach County's Transportation Planning Agency in its five-year plan for the Capital Improvement Projects within Palm Beach County and other identified plans in the region.

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** a dedicated funding source of annual revenue that provides support to transit operations and capital costs going to the SFRTA.

Palm Beach County continues to **MONITOR** state funding and other opportunities for rail transportation available in Palm Beach County including the expansion of service on FEC, CSX rail lines, and US 27 corridor rail lines.

## **AUTONOMOUS VEHICLES/TECHNOLOGY ADVANCEMENTS**

As the technology for self-driving cars grows and develops, Palm Beach County will **MONITOR** legislation related to autonomous vehicles.

## **INVESTMENTS IN HYBRID AND ELECTRICAL BUSES**

Palm Tran continues to implement policies and strategies aimed at creating a more sustainable transit system. Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** initiatives and cost-share programs that aid transit agencies seeking to expand their electric fleet and charging infrastructure.

Palm Tran **SUPPORTS** any legislation that increases funds deposited into the State Transportation Trust Fund (STTF), and Transportation Disadvantaged Trust Fund (TDTF) such as, but not limited to:

- Efforts to return money to the STTF that has been previously diverted.
- Opposition to any future measures that divert funding from the STTF for non-transportation purposes.
- Funding of the Innovative Service Development Grant through the TDTF.

## **TRANSPORTATION NETWORK COMPANIES**

Transportation Network Companies (TNCs) have continued to expand their service throughout the state and have introduced new consumers to the concept of ride sharing. The Florida Legislature passed laws in 2017 to help facilitate the expansion of their services in the state. In 2019, legislation expanded TNC service to non-emergency medical transportation (HB 411). Palm Beach County seeks to ensure that TNCs continue to complement public transit and **SUPPORTS** legislation that expands first mile-last mile transportation options for our residents. Palm Beach County will also **MONITOR** legislative efforts to reclassify TNC drivers from independent contractors to employees.

Palm Beach County **OPPOSES** any effort that would cap the fees charged by an airport to a transportation network company or vehicle for hire for picking up at the airport. Palm Beach County also **OPPOSES** efforts to restrict an airport from designating appropriate pick up and drop off locations or to require an airport to provide facilities for transportation network operations on airport property at no cost, including staging or parking locations on airport property.

## **5G INSTALLATION PREEMPTION**

In an effort to protect property values, community standards, and safety, Palm Beach County **OPPOSES** any additional preemption that would prohibit local governments discretion in permitting the design, color, aesthetics or installation standards of small cell node equipment in the implementation of 5G antennae installation.

## **BROADBAND ACCESS**

Once a rural access issue, a statewide need has been brought to light for reliable and affordable high-speed internet access, which is essential for residents to be prosperous in business, successful in education and have access to telemedicine to improve health outcomes.

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** the Department of Economic Opportunity's Office of Broadband in the effort to achieve access to reliable and affordable high-speed internet access to every household and business throughout the state.

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** changes to 350.81, F.S. that would ease the requirements to allow local governments to offer broadband service in underserved areas.

## PUBLIC SAFETY

### CERTIFICATES OF PUBLIC CONVENIENCE AND NECESSITY

Palm Beach County has a responsibility to promote the health, safety and welfare of its residents and visitors by providing for the regulation of life support services, promoting the development and maintenance of safe, healthy, efficient and service-oriented life support transport services. Palm Beach County's Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Ordinance establishes standards for issuing Certificates of Public Convenience and Necessity (COPCN) for basic and advanced life support services, which applies to the unincorporated and incorporated area of Palm Beach County.

Palm Beach County **OPPOSES** any legislative effort to preempt the County's ability to grant COPCNs to EMS providers within the county under Section 401.25, F.S.

### REENTRY FOR RETURNING CITIZENS/OFFENDERS

Florida continues to house one of America's largest prison populations. More than 34,000 people return to their communities from prison each year with more than 1,200 of those coming to Palm Beach County. Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** youth re-entry programs, efforts to restore rights to felons, and the allocation of resources to ensure successful re-entry of individuals into the regular workforce.

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** continued and recurring funding of the RESTORE Re-entry program with a \$500,000 appropriation. This program connects returning citizens from our local Palm Beach County Jail, the Florida Department of Corrections, and the Federal Bureau of Prisons to necessary services.

### REGULATION OF DRONES NEAR CRITICAL COUNTY FACILITIES

During the 2017 Legislative Session, HB 1027 enacted the "Unmanned Aircraft Systems Act" (Section 330.41, F.S.) that vested authority to regulate drones in the State and prohibited local governments from enacting ordinances that regulate drones. The new law also makes it unlawful for a person to operate a drone over or near a "critical infrastructure facility." However, critical infrastructure facility was defined as electrical generation or transmission facilities, chemical storage facilities, mining facility, natural gas facility or pipeline, natural gas or propane terminal or storage facility, oil or gas pipeline, and wireless communications facilities. Many of the County's critical facilities are not covered by this definition such as jails, law enforcement facilities, courthouses and other government buildings. The County is concerned that without a prohibition of drones over or in the proximity of critical county facilities, the possibility of escapes, terrorism, and breaches in confidentiality increase significantly; all of which affect public safety and could potentially compromise the judicial and policy setting process.

In 2023, the Legislature passed HB 645, which expanded the definition of a “critical infrastructure facility” to include several other locations including water and wastewater infrastructure. Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** an amendment to the definition of “critical infrastructure facility” in Section 330.41 F.S. to include jails, law enforcement facilities, courthouses, and buildings designated as the County Seat.

## **EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT PUBLIC RECORDS EXEMPTIONS**

### **A. After-Action Reports**

Emergency management agencies throughout Florida compile after-action reports and quality assurance activities to evaluate disaster response and to further improve or modify response plans based on assessment results. To conduct these quality assurance activities effectively, emergency management agencies rely on honest after-action reports from stakeholders. Exempting this information will ensure that response partners and stakeholders will openly and candidly report without fear of retribution. Pursuant to Sections 395.0193, 395.1055, and 395.4025, F.S., healthcare and trauma agencies quality assurance records are exempt following the same logic.

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** legislation to amend Sections 119.071(3) and 252.905, F.S. to provide for an exemption for emergency management after-action reports and quality assurance activities to evaluate disaster response and to further improve or modify the quality of disaster response.

### **B. Emergency Management Data**

Emergency management agencies throughout Florida are using emerging technologies that enable a multi-agency, multi-jurisdictional coordinated response to disasters and to implement emergency response plans across multiple agencies in real-time. Technologies include the ability in real-time to prioritize critical needs, assign tasks and personnel, and allocate resources as required to implement emergency plans. Exempting this information minimizes the risk of security system plans becoming subject to disclosure and could compromise security systems and security plans during emergencies when limited resources are available.

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** legislation to amend Section 119.071(3), F.S., to provide for an exemption for emergency management database platforms, applications, programs, software and all data and records contained therein, utilized to coordinate, plan, report, respond and recover from local and statewide emergencies and disasters.

## **MARSY’S LAW AMENDMENT**

To conduct active shooter and mass fatality incident response activities effectively, emergency management agencies rely on personal identifying information, as well as minimal healthcare data from first responders and healthcare providers. Currently, Sections 401.30 and 960.0011, F.S. (Marsy’s Law), prohibit the

disclosure of this information to emergency management agencies. Allowing disclosure of personal identifying information, as well as minimal healthcare data from first responders and healthcare providers to emergency management agencies in times of disaster will facilitate more effective family reunification and operation of family assistance centers.

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** legislation to amend Sections 401.30, and s. 960.0011, F.S. (Marsy's Law) to permit disclosure of personal identifying information and healthcare data from first responders and healthcare providers to emergency management agencies in times of disaster.

### **EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS FUNDING**

The Emergency Management Preparedness and Assistance Trust Fund (EMPA) was created within Ch. 252, F.S. Since the inception of the Trust Fund in 1993, it has remained at the same funding level despite a substantial increase in demands on county and municipal emergency management. The EMPA is administered under the oversight of the Executive Office of the Governor. An annual surcharge of \$2.00 per residential property insurance policy and \$4.00 per commercial property insurance policy is currently imposed. A recent Florida Legislative Committee on Intergovernmental Relations study suggests that changes in the insurance industry since the 1994 inception of the surcharge may be responsible for unintended "loopholes" in surcharge assessments. It is important to note that the fees or types of policies this surcharge affects have not been modified since the trust fund's inception.

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** an examination of methods to correct the deficiencies in surcharge collection and the application of the surcharge to the number of units or parcels included for coverage in a commercial or residential insurance policy. Prior to 2003, proceeds from the EMPA trust fund were distributed based on a fixed allocation formula in the statute and authorized each year by the Legislature. Since then, the annual appropriation levels for base grants to county emergency management programs have equaled \$7.1 million, a historical level representing approximately 44% of the annual trust fund proceeds.

Palm Beach County:

- **SUPPORTS** maintaining this funding level as the minimum allocation for county base grants.
- **SUPPORTS** an increase in county base grants to reflect the increased demands on county emergency management programs.
- **OPPOSES** efforts to shift state funding of emergency management from counties to cities.
- **SUPPORTS** maintaining the EMPA program administered by the Florida Division of Emergency Management (DEM) consistent with the original statutory intent (i.e., Section 252.373, F.S.).

Palm Beach County also **SUPPORTS** efforts to increase the fee that the Florida Division of Emergency Management can charge to review Comprehensive Emergency Management Plans to better balance the costs incurred by the County for staff to conduct the reviews. Currently, DEM can charge \$31.25 per hour.

### **DISASTER RELIEF - HURRICANE MILTON**

Hurricane Milton made landfall on the west coast of Florida on October 9, 2024. This catastrophic storm caused widespread damage, displacing families, straining resources, and disrupting essential services. According to the National Weather Service, Hurricane Milton produced a total of fifteen tornadoes across the state. Four of these tornadoes touched down in Palm Beach County, including a devastating EF-3 tornado that tore through portions of Wellington, Loxahatchee Groves, and Palm Beach Gardens leaving significant damage and debris in its wake. Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** disaster relief legislation that allocates resources for affected communities to rebuild and recover, including funds for counties to update and harden their emergency operations centers.

### **VICTIMS' SERVICES**

According to the Department of Justice, only 310 out of every 1,000 sexual assaults are reported to police. That means about 2 out of 3 go unreported.

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** legislation that would support survivors of sexual assault:

- Per Section 960.28, F.S., payment for a victim's initial forensic physical examinations is available to a medical provider who performs an initial forensic physical examination. The provider may not bill a victim or the victim's parent or guardian if the victim is a minor, directly or indirectly for that examination. The Crime Victims' Services Office of the Department of Legal Affairs shall pay for medical expenses connected with an initial forensic physical examination of a victim of sexual battery as defined in Chapter 794 or a lewd or lascivious offense as defined in Chapter 800.

The County also **SUPPORTS** efforts of the Office of the Attorney General to enforce the statewide collection of court fines and fees in order to stabilize the Crimes Compensation Trust Fund so that the initial forensic examination is fully compensated pursuant to Section 960.28, F.S.

### **VICTIM ADVOCATES PUBLIC RECORDS EXEMPTION**

Currently, personal information for victim advocates is public record. These individuals often work closely with victims of sensitive and high-risk situations, potentially exposing these advocates to threats or harassment from offenders or other related parties. Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** protecting the personal

information, including phone numbers, of victim advocates by exempting it from public record to ensure their safety and safeguard their crucial role in supporting victims of crime in our communities.

### **HEALTH CERTIFICATES**

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** a modification to Section 828.29, F.S., to remove the health certificate exemption for non-profit animal rescue groups. Current situation allows these groups to saturate our local communities with dogs from all over the country and beyond. There is no assurance that these animals are free from disease or were medically healthy prior to beginning their journey to our local communities.

### **DANGEROUS DOGS**

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** a modification to Section 767.12, F.S., to provide criminal consequences for people who conceal or lie about the whereabouts of a dog following a severe attack on a human or other domestic animal. Palm Beach County has had numerous examples of dogs inflicting severe injury; however, an owner can falsely claim the dog ran away in the moments prior to County staff arrival. There is no remedy in law for such situations.

### **ASSAULT OF CODE ENFORCEMENT AND ANIMAL CONTROL OFFICERS**

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** a modification to Section 784.07, F.S., to provide enhanced protection for animal control officers and all other types of code enforcement officers. A modification to this statute is necessary to include animal control officers and code enforcement officers as “other specified personnel” therefore eligible for enhanced protection under this statute.

### **RABIES VACCINATION OF DOGS, CATS, AND FERRETS**

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** legislation to amend Section 784.07, F.S., to expand the authority of persons vaccinating animals as an agent of a local government under the indirect supervision of a veterinarian to include owned animals not coming through the shelter system. This will assist in controlling rabies in historically underserved communities where rabies vaccination levels are under the minimum coverage rate of 70% by offering vaccine clinics in actual communities. As these residents often have limited transportation, it is difficult to get their animals to local veterinary clinics.

### **FIREARMS IN SENSITIVE LOCATIONS**

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** legislation prohibiting firearms in homeless shelters and locations where youth and family therapy services are provided by local governments to enhance safety and create secure environments for vulnerable populations. Homeless shelters and therapy centers often serve individuals who are experiencing crises, mental health challenges, issues with substance use, or trauma, and the presence of

firearms could escalate conflicts or trigger distress, endangering both clients and staff. By prohibiting firearms in these sensitive locations, the county seeks to protect all parties present, fostering secure spaces where people can access the care, services, and support they need without the fear of potential harm.

### **911 CALL PERSONNEL**

**MONITOR** any legislation that would change the definition of first responders to include 911 call personnel.

### **OPEN GOVERNMENT & SUNSET REVIEW ACT – PUBLIC SAFETY COMMUNICATION FACILITIES**

In 2020, the Legislature created a public records exemption for certain plans and geographic maps relating to 911, E911, or public safety radio communication structures. The Legislature also created a public meeting exemption for any portion of a meeting that would reveal the above information. Both exemptions are set to expire in October of 2025 unless they are saved from repeal by the Legislature. Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** legislation to allow this information to remain exempt from Florida’s public records requirements.

### **LIFEGUARD CERTIFICATION AND TRAINING**

Coastal/open water lifeguards are employed by local governments around the state to provide effective injury prevention and emergency medical/rescue services. In emergency circumstances, pre-hospital medical care at Florida’s public bathing places is necessary. In an effort to ensure minimum standards for rescue and pre-hospital medical care with transport providers, Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** legislation or regulatory action that would license and/or certify coastal/open water lifeguard agencies under the United States Lifesaving Association - Agency Certification program.

### **TOWING**

Palm Beach County **OPPOSES** any changes to Florida Statute to that would preempt any current additional consumer protections provided by Palm Beach County.

## **CRIMINAL JUSTICE**

### **DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

Domestic violence occurs in all races and ethnic groups, across all economic classes and educational levels. Nearly all victims are female (94%), and 31% of the women murdered in the United States are killed by their

significant others. Forty percent of homeless families in large cities are homeless because they are fleeing violence. Children whose mothers are abused are at a higher risk of also being abused. Furthermore, substance abuse is more likely to compound the risk of domestic violence. Locally, recent news reports of domestic violence victims dying at the hands of their abusers have raised the need to support further efforts to protect victims, treat abusers, and provide resources for families.

Therefore, Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS**:

Legislation that allows for a victim of domestic violence to terminate rental leases if the victim can prove that the discontinued employment or need to terminate a lease is a direct result of circumstances related to domestic violence as defined in Section 741.28, F.S. The victim must:

- a. Provide evidence, such as an injunction, protective order, or other such reasonable documentation authorized by state law, which reasonably proves that domestic violence has occurred.
- b. Reasonably believe that a future act of domestic violence, including being a victim of stalking as provided in Sections 784.048(3), (4), or (5), F.S. is likely to occur against the individual by a family or household member, as defined in Section 741.28, F.S.
- c. Make reasonable efforts to preserve lease by seeking a protective injunction prior to seeking a lease.
- d. Attempt to relocate if a victim successfully terminates a lease under the guidelines above.

Palm Beach County also **SUPPORTS** the expansion of allowable uses of the Domestic Violence Trust Fund articulated in Section 938.08, F.S., to include programming for domestic violence victims. Some of the programs suggested are an in-house batterer's intervention program and support services for victims to help with obtaining restraining orders and case management assistance, as well as funding for prevention, housing and treatment. Currently, these funds generated by fees are only used for law enforcement training for domestic violence issues and to offset the costs of incarceration of domestic violence offenders.

### **BATTERERS' INTERVENTION PROGRAMS**

Palm Beach County **RECOMMENDS** that The Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability (OPPAGA) evaluate the usage and effectiveness of BIPs across the State to determine whether the current 29-week psychoeducational model is being consistently ordered as envisioned and whether the curriculum is achieving the intended result of reducing repeat incidents of domestic violence.

Palm Beach County additionally **SUPPORTS** amending and revising Section 741.325, F.S., to:

- Require BIP providers to submit program and participant data including, but not limited to, number of participants, client outcome status, fees imposed and collected, sliding fee scales,

program curriculum, demographic information, and similar reporting and data metrics for the purpose of evaluating program efficiency and compliance.

- Amend BIP requirements to include minimum provider training and education, reduced program duration, acceptable program content to include alternative program models, and data collection and reporting requirements.
- Authorize each local jurisdiction to utilize alternative BIP models for the community in cooperation with the local participants in the justice system, as well as social service agencies at the community level. These alternative programs may include programming for children of domestic violence victims or perpetrators.

### **CENTER FOR YOUTHFUL OFFENDERS**

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** urging the Florida Department of Corrections to open a Youthful Offender Facility in South Florida. A Youthful Offender Center can be created within an existing structure here in South Florida. Such facilities house inmates up to 24 years of age whose crimes were committed before they turned 21 and whose sentences are ten years or less. A vital component to the rehabilitation of youthful offenders is being close to their families. However, the closest facility to Palm Beach County is in Sumter County. In 2012, a facility in Indian River County was closed down by the Department of Corrections due to budget cuts.

### **JUVENILE DETENTION CENTER**

The Palm Beach County Juvenile Assessment Center (JAC) and Detention Center opened in November 1998 with the goal of providing a 24/7 one-stop intake and assessment center for youthful offenders' initial entry into the juvenile justice system for the purposes of comprehensive case planning. By statute, JACs are a local option spearheaded by the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) in partnership with law enforcement and other community criminal justice entities. In Palm Beach County, this includes the State Attorney, School District Police, Palm Beach Sheriff's Office and other local service providers. The facility has fallen into disrepair over the years and is in dire need of refurbishment and major repair.

In 2023, the DJJ received state funding for pre-construction architectural and engineering services necessary to begin replacing three existing juvenile detention centers located in Hillsborough, Broward and Palm Beach. Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** continued funding for the replacement of the Palm Beach County Juvenile Justice Assessment and Detention Center, as well as funding for additional diversion programs.

### **DEPENDENCY CHILDREN AGING OUT OF FOSTER CARE**

Judges have seen that if a child is a crossover youth and goes into Dept. of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) commitment or is in DJJ commitment when they turn 18, they no longer are eligible for aging out benefits as DCF views

them a DJJ responsibility even though they have no parents taking care of them. As such, they would not qualify for benefits of Extended Foster Care such as housing assistance, upon their release from the DJJ program.

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** adding language to Section 39.6251, F.S. to provide that commitment in a DJJ program on their 18th birthday would satisfy requirements as a “qualifying activity” and as residing in a “supervised living environment” when determining eligibility for Extended Foster Care.

### **DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES GLADES REGION FACILITY**

The Department of Children and Families Glades building was constructed over twenty years ago. Because this facility receives a lot of foot traffic, it is important to keep up the maintenance of the building. The General Services Director determined that the building is in need of structural improvements, attention to handicap bathrooms, pest removal, and other upgrades.

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** funding to help with maintenance and repair of the Glades Region Department of Children and Families facility.

### **MARCHMAN ACT REVISIONS**

The Marchman Act is a civil process established in Chapter 397, F.S. that provides for the involuntary or voluntary assessment, stabilization, and treatment of a person abusing or addicted to drugs or alcohol.

The Marchman Act involves a two-step process of assessment and then treatment. The most common way Marchman cases are initiated is with the filing of a petition for involuntary assessment in the county where the substance abuser is located. The criteria for the Marchman Act petition requires a demonstration that the individual has lost the power of self-control with respect to substance use and either (a) the individual is in need of substance abuse services and is incapable of making a rational decision in regard to receiving services or (b) is likely to suffer from neglect or has inflicted or threatened or attempted to inflict physical harm on oneself or another, or is likely to do so unless admitted.

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** the amendment of the Marchman Act to:

- Clarify the definitions of access center, designated receiving facility, and triage center to define functionality and the ability to receive and hold involuntary patients.
- Provide flexibility for courts to retain jurisdiction over an individual who fails to complete involuntary treatment or relapses within 12 months, and to order individuals to be transferred to licensed recovery residences upon completion of treatment if recommended by a service provider and if additional funding is available.

- Provide for circumstances under which an individual may be held in protective custody to allow for additional petitions to be filed in state court, and to allow minors to be held in treatment facilities until a petition for involuntary treatment is heard in court.

Palm Beach County additionally **SUPPORTS** increased and appropriate funding for crisis mental health and substance abuse beds statewide. Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** increased funding for public receiving facilities and maintaining funding for public facilities if new state general revenue is provided to private receiving facilities. Palm Beach County also **SUPPORTS** coordinated efforts to increase access to acute care behavioral health services for individuals and families.

### **PRE-TRIAL RELEASE**

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** maintaining county ability to provide non-monetary pre-trial release services that ensure the safety and welfare of local communities.

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** the expansion of state resources to assist treatment-based drug court programs. Eligible drug-addicted persons may be sent to Drug Court in lieu of traditional justice system case processing. Drug Courts keep individuals in treatment long enough for it to work, while supervising them closely.

### **BRITTANY'S LAW - DRIVER SAFETY FOR MINORS**

In April 2015, a 17-year-old was accused of running a stop sign and killing 18-year old Palm Beach County resident Brittany Baxter. At the time, the 17-year-old had been charged with eight traffic citations in the 33 months he was authorized to drive.

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** legislation that would create enhanced driver safety by either increasing points assigned for repeat driving infractions incurred by drivers under the age of 18 and/or adjusting the state's graduated driver license program to restrict driver privileges for repeat offenders.

### **BLOOD TEST SCREENING FOR CERTAIN DISEASES THROUGH SIGNIFICANT EXPOSURE**

Law enforcement officers are often exposed to hazardous materials and bodily fluids while on the job. At times, these officers can experience accidental, significant exposure to bodily fluids, which puts them at risk for contracting a variety of infectious diseases. To prevent an unnecessary delay in the early diagnosis and treatment of the exposed person, a Broward County Chief Judge signed an administrative order that allowed for the prompt blood testing and disclosure of the results of the individual who is the source of the fluids. The administrative order allows for screening of the source individual's blood for certain diseases, if a physician deems it medically necessary, without the need for a court order if said person refuses to

voluntarily submit a blood sample. Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** efforts to revise Florida law to allow this practice statewide to aid in the early diagnosis and treatment of law enforcement officers exposed to disease under these narrow circumstances.

## **FIRE RESCUE**

### **CARBON MONOXIDE DETECTORS**

Several times a year, the Palm Beach County Fire Rescue handles fatalities that have occurred because running car engines in garages have emitted toxic levels of carbon dioxide. If more homes were constructed with carbon monoxide detectors, these incidents could be eliminated. Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** education to encourage the installment of detectors in garages of new construction homes.

### **MOBILE INTEGRATED HEALTH**

Mobile integrated Healthcare (MIH) is an overarching term that captures the concept of a new type of Emergency Medical Services (EMS) delivery system. In most cases, MIH is a more cost-effective and more efficient method of providing appropriate care to the ever-growing population of 911 callers who have a medical issue that needs attention but does not constitute an emergency, as well as callers who do not need a quick emergency response. Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** change in statute to allow for MIH-Community Paramedicine to bill insurance for non-emergency transport and care.

### **FIRE CODE ENFORCEMENT**

Palm Beach County **OPPOSES** any effort by state government to infringe upon home rule authority by attempting to mandate change to Palm Beach County's established Fire Code and Enforcement practices.

## **LOCAL GOVERNMENT/ADMINISTRATIVE**

### **MUNICIPAL ANNEXATION**

Palm Beach County will **MONITOR** any legislation relating to the annexation of unincorporated land by municipalities.

### **VALUE ADJUSTMENT BOARD**

The Palm Beach County Value Adjustment Board received 5,670 petitions in 2023, with each petitioner paying a \$15 filing fee. While the number of petitions filed has decreased significantly since the 2009 recession, the cost to conduct the hearings is compounded by rising personnel, special magistrate and VAB Legal Counsel costs. The current filing fee has been in effect since 1988 and does not nearly approach the cost of nearly \$100 per petition hearing. Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** raising the filing fee to cover the increasing costs to process them.

### **PUBLIC RECORDS EXEMPTION FOR SOLICITATION OF GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES**

In recent years, there have been a growing number of public records requests of county government from individuals and companies looking for employee contact information for the purpose of solicitation of goods and services. Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** a request to exempt government employee contact information in situations where it is being requested for the blanket solicitation of goods and services.

### **PUBLIC RECORDS EXEMPTION FOR COUNTY ADMINISTRATORS**

Legislation has previously been filed to create an exemption from public records requirements for the personal identifying and location information of county administrators, deputy county administrators, and assistant county administrators. County administrators handle an array of sensitive issues, which can include matters of neglect and abuse, eminent domain, code enforcement, land use, zoning, and labor and employment. Over the past several years, instances of threats of violence against these administrators have notably increased. Therefore, Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** a public records exemption county administrators, deputy county administrators, and assistant county administrators.

### **PUBLIC RECORDS REQUESTS ABUSE**

The public records laws in Florida have granted the people rights without responsibility. People can, and do, misuse these laws, seemingly immune from consequences. Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** state public records laws that maintain a meaningful public right of access while reducing the potential for mischief and misuse that are relevant to the realities of modern communication.

### **SOVEREIGN IMMUNITY – THRESHOLD CHANGES**

There have been several attempts in recent years to revise sovereign immunity thresholds for local

governments. Palm Beach County **OPPOSES** bills which would remove or drastically increase sovereign immunity thresholds for local governments.

### **SOVEREIGN IMMUNITY – RECREATION**

As the State of Florida continues to experience dramatic growth in population, so does the demand for recreational facilities to serve the populace. One recurring issue has been the reluctance of public agencies to allow or permit recreational activities on their property due to an unacceptable level of tort exposure.

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** an amendment to Section 768.28, F.S. to provide sovereign immunity for any public property intended or permitted to be used for recreational purposes.

### **ANONYMOUS CODE ENFORCEMENT COMPLAINTS**

In 2021, Florida enacted Senate Bill 60, amending Florida Statute Chapter 162 to prohibit code enforcement officers from initiating investigations based on anonymous complaints. This legislation requires individuals reporting potential code violations to provide their name and address before an investigation can proceed. While the intent of this law is to reduce baseless or retaliatory complaints, it has led to residents being hesitant to report legitimate health and safety violations due to fear of retribution from neighbors. This apprehension could undermine community efforts to maintain safety and property standards.

Recognizing these challenges, Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** legislation that would restore the authority of code inspectors to act on complaints submitted anonymously, thereby encouraging residents to report violations without fear of personal repercussions.

### **BUILDING CODES**

Following the devastating event that took place on June 24, 2021 at Champlain Towers located in Surfside, Florida, Palm Beach County has undertaken a series of meetings with local building officials and stakeholders regarding developing and implementing a program to evaluate the safety of certain multi-family building types in Palm Beach County. Palm Beach County believes the issue of building safety transcends beyond the boundaries of the county and the legislature should seek to provide comprehensive and uniform requirements requiring periodic inspections for such facilities. Palm Beach County will **MONITOR** any legislation requiring additional inspection requirements for multi-family condominium facilities in Florida or efforts to delay implementation of inspections or sprinkler requirements. The County will also **SUPPORT** legislation to provide relief to condo owners facing the effects of required financial responsibilities and structural inspections of condominium and community associations.

## **PALM BEACH COUNTY BUILDING CODE ADVISORY BOARD**

The Building Code Advisory Board (BCAB) was established by a Special Act of the Florida Legislature in 1974. The BCAB exists to offer administrative and technical interpretations, new product evaluation, and technical support to the county and its 39 municipalities to promote consistent and proper application of the Florida Building Code throughout Palm Beach County. Currently, the Special Act defines a “Building Official” as a full-time employee of a local government. Since the BCAB was established, the industry has shifted with local governments increasingly relying on part-time contracted staff and private providers. Under the current definition, these individuals are ineligible to serve on the BCAB, even if qualified. This restriction has created challenges for County staff, who have struggled to fill vacancies when members become term-limited. As a result, some seats remain vacant, making it difficult to achieve a quorum for meetings.

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** a local bill that aims to resolve these issues by revising the definition of “building official,” expanding the pool of eligible candidates and enabling the Board of County Commissioners to appoint qualified professionals more effectively.

## **PROPERTY INSURANCE**

In 2022, a Special Session was called with the purpose of addressing the property insurance crisis in Florida, legislators codified several changes to Florida’s property insurance laws. Some of these changes included:

- The creation of the Florida Optional Reinsurance Assistance program (FORA), which allows insurance companies to purchase reinsurance at "reasonable" rates.
- Reducing the amount of time that policyholders have to file a new or reopened claim from two years to one year and from three years to eighteen months for a supplemental claim.
- Allowing the Office of Insurance Regulation (OIR) to issue fines, suspend or revoke an insurer's certificate of authority if the insurance company engages in unfair trade practices with regard to appraisals.
- Shortening the time insurance companies have to pay or deny claims from 90 to 60 days.
- Tightening the timeline that insurers must review and acknowledge claim communication and begin investigations.
- Eliminating one-way attorney's fees.
- Prohibiting the assignment of benefits of any post-loss insurance benefit under any residential or commercial property insurance policy issued beginning January 1, 2023.
- Increasing the eligibility requirements for those renewing coverage through Citizens Property Insurance Corporation to encourage Citizens customers to purchase from a private insurer.

Floridians have been experiencing substantial increases in their property insurance rates over the last several years, contributing to the skyrocketing cost of housing seen throughout the state. Palm Beach County will

**SUPPORT** legislative proposals that would provide more predictability in the market and work to address the increased costs of property insurance for homeowners.

### **ELECTION CYCLE FOR SUPERVISORS OF ELECTIONS**

Supervisors of Elections in Florida follow an election cycle prescribed by the state that requires a Supervisor to run every four years. Florida Statute 98.015 prescribes in which years a Supervisor should run for election. The way that their four-year election cycle currently works places them on the ballot in the same year as a Presidential election. Presidential election years tend to be the busiest and most intensive of the election cycles. In order to provide the best opportunities for incumbent Supervisors to effectively manage their busiest election, Palm Beach County believes that Supervisor of Election cycles should fall outside of Presidential election cycles. Therefore, the County **SUPPORTS** legislation that would provide for these elections to occur during gubernatorial election cycles.

### **CERTIFICATION OF JUDICIAL NEED**

In December 2024, the Florida Supreme Court issued its annual certification of judicial need, identifying the necessity for additional judges across various courts in the state. Palm Beach County's Fifteenth Judicial Circuit has been certified for two new circuit court judges and two new county court judges. Despite rapid population growth, our county has not received an additional judgeship in nineteen years. Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** efforts to create and fund these new positions to provide much-needed additional judicial resources to our residents.

## **EDUCATION**

### **LIBRARIES**

Local governments receive state support for libraries through three different programs: the State Aid Program, the Regional Multi-type Library Cooperative Grant program, and the Public Library Construction Grant Program. Continuation of these funding sources will ensure that the State plays an appropriate role in enhancing public library service by matching local library expenditures, enhancing consortia services to area libraries, and providing needed dollars for the construction of new public libraries.

In FY 24-25, the Legislature funded the State Aid to Public Libraries grant program at \$17.5 million. Funding for Library Construction Grants was funded at \$3.9 million (vetoed), and Library Cooperatives totaled \$2 million.

### *State Aid to Public Libraries*

A strong fiscal foundation for our public libraries is critical to the state's economic and educational success. The State Aid to Public Libraries Grant program has been the cornerstone of public library support in our state since 1963. Palm Beach County strongly **SUPPORTS** the State aid to Public Libraries program be sustained at \$17.5 million in recurring funds, in conjunction with \$6 million in non-recurring funding (F.S. 257.17).

State Aid grant funding assists Floridians with:

- Economic development resources to small businesses and job seekers.
- Access to government services, especially e-government – public libraries are the “go to” place when Floridians need to access the Internet and the vast array of services and products online.
- Education and reading – libraries are the safety net that ensures school success for students of all ages.

### *New Public Library Construction Grants*

As Florida adds thousands of new residents every month, public library infrastructure needs to grow to service this increased demand. The addition of new libraries assists residents with getting access to services and resources by reducing the distance residents have to travel to their local library. New libraries also incorporate the latest technology and designs to create welcoming community spaces. Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** full funding to support all eligible applications for grant funding. A total of \$3.9 million in construction grants was approved by the Legislature in FY 24-25, but was vetoed by the Governor.

### *Regional Multi-type Library Cooperatives*

The Palm Beach County Library System is a member of the regional multi-type library consortia known as the Southeast Florida Library Information Network (SEFLIN), which connects both public and academic libraries. The community is served more effectively through the joint use of technology, continuing education and training of library staff. In FY 24-25, funding for the Cooperatives was \$2 million. Each grantee is awarded up to \$400,000. Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** an appropriation of at least \$2 million for Library Cooperatives. These funds are critical for the continued operation of Florida's five multi-type library cooperatives (MLC's). These funds are used to:

- Promote resource sharing so Floridians can easily obtain resources from other libraries using statewide delivery and reciprocal borrowing services.
- Continuously upgrade the skills of library employees to improve the experience of Florida library customers.
- Create connections between libraries to encourage adoption of technologies and services important to Floridians.

## **EARLY LEARNING COALITION**

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** efforts to increase hours for children entering the Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) program, based on assessment, would benefit from increased instructional hours to strengthen kindergarten readiness. Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** maintaining School Readiness (SR) providers' ability to receive payment differential based on the results of observational assessment and implementation of approved child assessment.

## **PHYSICAL HEALTH**

Palm Beach County realizes that the physical health of students is as vital to learning and growth as mental health, and **SUPPORTS** efforts to emphasize physical health and fitness programming in our schools.

## **PALM BEACH COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT**

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** the legislative agenda put forward by the School District of Palm Beach County covering different focus areas:

School Safety and Security: Fully fund student security requirements without the need for the local community funding. Increase the Safe Schools categorical allocation to reduce the cost gap associated with funding one Safe School officer for school.

Students: Increase the investment in mental health services by allocating funding for training for personnel providing mental health services in schools. Seek flexibility in the implementation of HB 733 (2023) to mitigate the potential challenges of start/stop times for students.

Teachers/Staff: Increase funding for expansion of district programs dedicated to developing future teachers and other high needs staff in collaboration with local universities, colleges, and technical centers.

Finance: Provide an increase in Base Student Allocation (BSA) commensurate with unprecedented inflation and cost of living increases to meet the rising costs of operations. Address compression issues impacting teacher salaries for mid-career teachers in light of restrictions found in F.S 1012.22 and expand flexibility within the State budget teacher salary allocation. Hold districts harmless for voucher enrollment growth beyond legislative projections.

Accountability and Assessment: Ensure alternative options continue to be made available for the new progress monitoring assessments using portfolios, concordant scores, etc. to assist students to succeed.

Pre-kindergarten/After Care: Fund full-day, high quality Voluntary Pre-K program.

Palm Beach County also **SUPPORTS** the School District of Palm Beach County's efforts to establish an African American History at the historic Roosevelt High School in West Palm Beach.

### **PALM BEACH STATE COLLEGE**

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** additional funding for Palm Beach State College to construct a nationally recognized Emergency Response Training Center, which will prepare local, state, and federal emergency response professionals to respond to all kinds of disasters locally and across the country.

With the rising demand for autonomous/electric vehicles, the automotive industry requires technicians with specialized training. Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** the PBSC's Transportation Technology Expansion Project to convert unused space in their existing lab into a eight-bay unit with modern equipment to educate and train the next generation of automotive technicians.

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** Palm Beach State College's request for funding to assist with the second phase of their efforts to establish a Construction Technology Services Degree at the College. Funds will be utilized to provide expanded classrooms and labs at their Lake Worth campus to prepare students for employment as skilled technicians and supervisors across multiple disciplines in the construction trades.

### **FLORIDA ATLANTIC UNIVERSITY**

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** Florida Atlantic University's request for new funding to accomplish four goals, including investing in instructional and research faculty; continuing to expand the medical school's enrollment and residency programming; continuing to create a support structure to maintain first-tier research institution status and support the university's goal of becoming a Top 100 (U.S. News and World Report) Public Research University; and establishing an innovative compensation program to address compression issues as a result of widespread and rapid enhancements across the state university system in Florida.

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** Florida Atlantic University Lab Schools as it seeks new funding to support the creation of the FAU Lab Schools Institute, which will build on the lab school district's stellar reputation of innovation in education by equipping teachers, administrators and educational leaders at schools throughout Florida with the skills to facilitate learning that prepares students for the challenges of the future. The Institute will accomplish this through the sharing of best practices and strategies that improve student outcomes and by developing and delivering tailored Professional Development programs tailored for educators at all levels.

### **CAREER EDUCATION FUNDING**

Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) curricula has been predominantly taught in colleges or post-secondary institutions in Florida. Based upon the need for qualified candidates within the STEM fields, Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** efforts to expand, enhance and provide adequate funding of

STEM programs to public career academies, K-12 educational programs, and career programs in higher education.

Palm Beach County also **SUPPORTS** funding efforts to expand and enhance vocational training programs.

### **CULTURAL ARTS AND HISTORIC GRANTS FUNDING**

The Florida Division of Cultural Affairs (DCA) at the Department of State recommends to the Legislature a ranked list of qualified grant applicants for Cultural and Museum Grants, Cultural Projects, Cultural Facilities, and the Cultural Endowment Program. Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** full funding of the Cultural Grant application list as approved by the DCA.

### **GLADES CAREER READINESS ROUNDTABLE**

**SUPPORT** the continuation of the adult Commercial Vehicle Driving Program Testing Center. Palm Beach County also **SUPPORTS** the expansion of various programs under the Medical Sciences Department at West Technical Education Center, as well as funding for the refurbishment of the facilities necessary to support these programs.

## **AGRICULTURE**

### **FARM TO SCHOOL PROGRAMS**

Integrated Farm to School programs have the ability to positively affect entire communities. One of the most valuable components of supporting Farm to School initiatives is the opportunity to increase access to fresh produce within a domestic food assistance program that services low-income families. Farm to School programs encourage a lifelong appreciation for healthy eating habits by creating an environment that exposes children to a variety of fruits and vegetables. Aside from the nutritional benefits of increasing the availability of fresh produce in school meals, the local economy benefits from an additional marketplace and could indirectly promote job creation in the agricultural community.

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** legislation that would assist in integrating locally grown produce into school meals.

## **HUNGER RELIEF PLAN**

Nationally, more than 44 million Americans have trouble regularly putting nutritious food on the table. Despite its wealth, more than 170,000 residents in Palm Beach County struggle with hunger. People cannot always feed themselves and their families because they have too little money, too little access both to federal nutrition programs and to sources of affordable healthy food, and too little information about how their challenges can be overcome. For over a decade, Palm Beach County partners increased the availability of fresh produce that would otherwise go to waste through gleaning events. Gleaning occurs from November through July, weather permitting. Support continued efforts to allow for gleaning activities.

According to Feeding America, 20 billion pounds of fruits and vegetables are discarded on farms or plowed under. The USDA has estimated that 35 million pounds of food are needed annually to feed the hungry in Palm Beach County. Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** legislation and funding to help support the Palm Beach County Hunger Relief Plan, local non-profits and local farmers

## **ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES**

### **LAKE OKEECHOBEE OPERATIONS AND THE SFWMD LOWER EAST COAST (LEC) WATER SUPPLY PLAN**

Lake Okeechobee is a critical component in achieving environmental restoration, water supply, agriculture, tourism, and recreation objectives in South Florida. The Lake is essential and interconnected to communities, businesses, public water supplies, and ecosystems. Palm Beach County residents, taxpayers and visitors depend on healthy, reliable and predictable lake levels to sustain a robust and diverse economy. As such, Lake Okeechobee operations are a high priority for the Palm Beach County Board of County Commissioners.

In August of 2024, the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) replaced the Lake Okeechobee Regulation Schedule 2008 (LORS08) with the Lake Okeechobee System Operating Manual (LOSOM). Palm Beach County has both short-term and long-term water supply concerns and concerns with the Lake Okeechobee Discharges to the Lake Worth Lagoon (LWL) Estuary.

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** all water policy efforts at the state-level and through the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) that will specifically and explicitly state the commitment to provide protection of a 1 in 10 year level of water supply resilience in Palm Beach County.

Palm Beach County **OPPOSES** operational decisions of the SFWMD to release unwanted and excess water to the Lake Worth Lagoon.

## **COMPREHENSIVE EVERGLADES RESTORATION PLAN PROJECTS IN PALM BEACH COUNTY**

Palm Beach County has supported and continues to support state and federal efforts to implement the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP). In fact, eight of the 68 CERP components authorized by Congress in 2000 were to be constructed within Palm Beach County that would have provided environmental restoration while maintaining the drainage and water supply.

Unfortunately, more than 20 years after Congressional authorization of CERP, no CERP projects have been completed within Palm Beach County. Not surprisingly, many local stakeholders are frustrated with the pace of CERP project implementation within the County, as the promised water supply protections have not been maintained and the anticipated benefits have not been realized and the project timelines remain unclear. In addition, the 2020 Working Draft Integrated Delivery Schedule (IDS), the roadmap for CERP and the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Program through Fiscal Year 2032, only includes one of the eight CERP components, which is the Loxahatchee River Watershed Restoration Project (LRWRP). The implementation timeline for the remaining six components are not included on the IDS.

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** efforts by the State of Florida, SFWMD, USACE, and FDEP to advance both interim and long-term Congressionally-authorized CERP projects within Palm Beach County that would benefit the Lake Worth Lagoon estuary, reduce potential flooding impacts, and increase the availability of water supplies.

Palm Beach County appreciates and **SUPPORTS** the continued funding of the C-51 Reservoir to increase water storage and reduce damaging flows to the Lake Worth Lagoon estuary.

## **LAKE OKEECHOBEE WATERSHED RESTORATION**

No estuary or community should have to endure the short-term toxic algae bloom conditions or long-term water quality degradation that has resulted due to the cumulative impacts of decades of excess stormwater flows with high nutrient content. Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** making adjustments in the timing of releases to reduce the likelihood of Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs) as long as these adjustments do not increase the risk of failure of the Herbert Hoover Dike (HHD) or result in more water being released than what was modeled and evaluated in the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process. When water levels are at or forecast to rise to an elevation that compromises the HHD the USACE should make near maximum releases to lower the Lake quickly and shorten the duration of time when the estuaries are subjected to freshwater flows. It should be remembered that the well intended goal of reducing the impact on salinities in the Saint Lucie and Caloosahatchee Estuaries by changing to much lower release rates in combination with a higher algae level in Lake Okeechobee resulted in the severe growth and accumulation of algae.

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** a renewed focus on the implementation of regional-scale and local-scale water storage and water quality treatment projects in Lake Okeechobee tributary basins north of Lake Okeechobee consistent with and/or compatible with CERP prior to Congressional authorization.

## **LOXAHATCHEE RIVER WATERSHED RESTORATION**

In 1985, the U.S. Department of the Interior designated the Northwest Fork of the Loxahatchee River a National Wild and Scenic River. In 2000, Congress authorized the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) that included several projects to both provide the required Minimum Flows and Levels (MFL) and provide flow sufficient to restore the river. The goal of the Loxahatchee River Watershed Restoration Project (LRWRP) includes improving flows to the Northwest Fork of the Loxahatchee River (NWFLR) and restoring wetlands that form the historic headwaters of the river.

Joint state and federal planning efforts related to the Loxahatchee River Watershed Restoration Project began in 2003 (then referred to as North Palm Beach County - Part 1), were put on hold in 2011 and re-started in 2015, with a much reduced project scope in terms of water supply. County staff have been engaged in every iteration of the LRWRP project including when it was identified as the North Palm Beach County Project. Palm Beach County has acquired and restored almost 28,000 acres of natural areas and wetlands within the Loxahatchee River watershed for the benefit of the ecosystem.

Unfortunately, the current LRWRP does not include the 48,000 acre-feet of storage (Component GGG6) that was envisioned in CERP and as approved by Congress in 2000 or the pump station required to capture ITID runoff (that is currently going to tide through the LWL Estuary) for use by the City of West Palm Beach (CWPB). This storage component and the pump stations reduced damaging discharges of excess freshwater to the Lake Worth Lagoon estuary and provided a source of freshwater for CWPB and beneficial dry season deliveries to improve salinity conditions in the Lake Worth Lagoon estuary and NWFLR.

During the last three legislative sessions, the State provided Palm Beach County \$283 million in funding for the design and construction of Cell 12, Cell 13, Inflow structure, Outflow Pump Station, and construction of the required conveyance between the reservoir and the L-8 canal. Palm Beach County continues to **SUPPORT** additional appropriations to improve the L-8 Basin, Loxahatchee River Watershed and Lake Worth Lagoon estuary.

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** efforts by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection and the South Florida Water Management District to collaborate with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the County and other key local stakeholders to implement locally supported elements of the Loxahatchee River Watershed Restoration Project in advance of Congressional appropriations. Implementation of these elements will help achieve early restoration benefits and to reduce additional ecological impacts to the Loxahatchee River Watershed.

### **Palm Beach County RECOMMENDS:**

- The LRWRP performance during extend dry periods relies heavily on water supplied by the four 5-mgd Aquifer Storage and Recovery (ASR) wells. The design is currently not scheduled to start until 2027 with construction scheduled to be completed in 2033. Once constructed, the ASR wells will require several years of injection to store the required volume for a drought. PBC recommends creating a connection to be able to deliver water from the C-51 Reservoir Phase 2 to the NWFLR. This will shorten the time to restorative/protective flow and in the long term provide a more resilient system.
- The current schedule of the LWRP expedite the acquisition of the land required for cost effective construction of a pump station to capture water from ITID Lower M-1 Basin and lift it into the

CWPB M-Canal.

**LOXAHATCHEE RIVER PRESERVATION INITIATIVE: \$358,500**

The Loxahatchee River is the southernmost tributary of the Indian River Lagoon and includes the North Fork of the Loxahatchee River, one of two nationally designated Wild and Scenic Rivers in Florida. Despite its federal designation as a Wild and Scenic River and the protective status associated with classification as an Outstanding Florida Water, significant problems need to be addressed to improve water quality and quantity within the two water bodies.

The Loxahatchee River Preservation Initiative (LRPI) is the outgrowth of a watershed management effort started by the FDEP in 1996. LRPI has a long history of working with both the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection to request and receive legislative appropriations to complete essential restoration projects within the Loxahatchee River watershed. Projects are ranked and prioritized by the LRPI Steering Committee, including local agencies and stakeholders with knowledge and experience of the ecosystem. The list is then submitted for legislative appropriations consideration.

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** legislative funding for the 2025 priority list of ranked projects as established by the Steering Committee of the LRPI.

<b>2025 Loxahatchee River Preservation Initiative FUNDING REQUESTS</b>					
<b>No.</b>	<b>Project Name</b>	<b>Entity</b>	<b>Funding Request of State</b>	<b>Local Match</b>	<b>Estimated Project Cost</b>
1	Daniels Way Water Quality Improvements	Town of Jupiter	\$103,500	\$103,500	\$207,000
2	Loxahatchee River Headwaters Easement Mapping, Jupiter Farms	South Indian River Water Control District	\$75,000	\$75,000	\$150,000
3	Loxahatchee Slough Habitat Restoration Phase II	Palm Beach County	\$180,000	\$180,000	\$360,000
	<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>\$358,500</b>	<b>\$358,500</b>	<b>\$717,000</b>

**LAKE WORTH LAGOON INITIATIVE: \$525,750**

The Lake Worth Lagoon (LWL) estuary stretches 20 miles along the shores of 13 municipalities from North Palm Beach to Ocean Ridge and has been subject to pollution and habitat losses for decades. The Lake Worth Lagoon Initiative (Initiative) is supported by Palm Beach County, South Florida Water Management District, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Florida Inland Navigation District, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and the League of Cities, which have collectively endorsed the LWL

Management Plan to restore the Lagoon. This plan includes projects to restore sea grasses, mangroves and oysters, cap muck sediments, construct stormwater control projects, and to complete septic to sewer conversions. Revitalizing this important waterbody provides long-term environmental, recreational, and economic benefits to the region. The Lake Worth Lagoon Management Plan can be found at [www.lwli.org](http://www.lwli.org).

2025 Lake Worth Lagoon Initiative FUNDING REQUESTS					
No.	Project Name	Entity	Funding Request of State	Local Match	Estimated Project Cost
1	Lake Worth Lagoon System Assessment	Palm Beach County	\$154,500	\$154,500	\$309,000
2	9 <sup>th</sup> Avenue South Outfall Restoration	City of Lake Worth Beach	\$371,250	\$371,250	\$742,500
	<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>\$525,750</b>	<b>\$575,570</b>	<b>\$1,051,500</b>

The Initiative was created to define and evaluate the status of the entire LWL watershed and propose actions that would improve and protect the natural resources of the system while also enhancing the resiliency of the lagoon and its watershed. Through this program, over \$25 million in State funds and \$69 million in local funds have been dedicated to restoring the Lagoon. The projects shown in the table above were prioritized by Initiative members and funding partners. Implementation of each of the ranked projects will help realize key components of the adopted Lake Worth Lagoon Management Plan.

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** legislative funding for the 2025 priority list of ranked projects as established by the steering committee of the Lake Worth Lagoon Initiative.

**BEACH AND INLET MANAGEMENT PROJECT APPROPRIATIONS**

Florida’s beaches are the focus of our tourism industry and are critical in maintaining Florida’s tourism brand. Their role in providing upland property protection against storm damage makes them key components of our economy. The benefits to property values, tourism, and jobs by maintaining healthy beaches far outweigh the investment needed to combat coastal erosion. Seventy-one and a half (71.5) percent of beaches in Palm Beach County are designated as critically eroded by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection. State matching grants are a vital component of the funding required to maintain this essential infrastructure. The County is requesting inclusion of all Palm Beach County shore protection projects in the State’s Beach Management Funding Assistance Program. A table with the details of those requests is included on the next page.

## 2025 Session Beach & Inlet Management FUNDING REQUESTS

No.	Project Name	Description	Grant Funding Request	Local Match	Estimated Project Cost
1	Coral Cove Dune Restoration	Construction, Monitoring	\$2,229,063	\$2,229,063	\$4,458,126
2	Jupiter Inlet Management	Construction	\$1,999,043	\$1,999,043	\$3,998,086
3	North County Comprehensive Shore Protection Project – Segment 1	Construction, Monitoring, Design	\$3,162,500	\$3,162,500	\$6,325,000
4	North County Comprehensive Shore Protection Project – Segment 2	Construction, Monitoring	\$1,060,000	\$1,060,000	\$2,120,000
5	North County Comprehensive Shore Protection Project – Segment 3	Design	\$262,500	\$262,500	\$525,000
6	Singer Island Dune Restoration	Construction, Monitoring	\$2,436,477	\$2,436,477	\$4,872,954
7	Lake Worth Inlet Management	Monitoring	\$416,000	\$416,000	\$832,000
8	Mid-Town Beach Nourishment	Design, Construction	\$1,406,430	\$1,406,430	\$20,980,000*
9	Phipps Ocean Park Beach Nourishment	Construction	\$7,558,200	\$11,821,800	\$26,380,000*
10	Ocean Ridge Shore Protection	Design, Construction	\$3,267,237	\$3,267,237	\$18,986,747*
11	Delray Beach Shore Protection	Construction, Monitoring	\$9,664,404	\$9,664,404	\$34,507,263*
12	North Boca Raton Shore Protection Project	Monitoring	\$183,650	\$183,550	\$482,300
13	Central Boca Raton Shore Protection Project	Monitoring	\$157,300	\$214,800	\$372,100
14	South Boca Raton Shore Protection Project	Monitoring	\$207,000	\$386,200	\$535,000
15	Boca Raton Inlet Management	Construction, Monitoring	\$494,900	\$204,500	\$699,400
	<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>\$34,391,844</b>	<b>\$38,714,504</b>	<b>\$126,073,703*</b>

\*includes Federal funds

Shore protection through beach nourishment is the most effective and economical strategy to protect coastal infrastructure and the tourism-based economy of the State from regularly occurring extreme weather events. The USACE has abruptly implemented a new interpretation of policy guidelines for federally

authorized shore protection projects that now requires non-federal sponsors to acquire perpetual construction easements (PCE's) from 100% of the upland owners within a project footprint before construction can proceed. Property owners are reluctant to execute these easement agreements due to overly broad language, no assurance of project construction or maintenance and no termination clause in the event the federal authorization is revoked or lapses. The new interpretation of these policy guidelines effectively terminates federal participation in historically successful, Coastal Storm Risk Management (CSR) and future Flood Control and Coastal Emergency (FCCE) projects.

## **PHASE II OF THE J.W. CORBETT LEVEE SYSTEM IMPROVEMENT PROJECT**

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and SFWMD efforts to complete Phase II of the Project.

## **MOSQUITO BORNE DISEASE FUNDING**

Malaria reappeared in Florida in 2023 after a 20-year absence, giving new urgency to the preventative efforts of mosquito control programs across the state. This reminds us that even during calm periods between our endemic outbreaks of diseases such as West Nile Virus (WNV) and St. Louis Encephalitis (SLE) that the task of protecting residents from mosquito borne disease never stops. Every incidence of imported disease is an opportunity for that disease to gain a foothold in Palm Beach County, and the Mosquito Control Division strives to prevent that from happening through aggressive case investigations and proactive control efforts. Moreover, while nuisance mosquito control efforts lack the direct intention to control mosquito borne disease, the result is to diminish the potential for local mosquitoes to host those diseases. Continuing to embrace new technologies and tools to carry out this important function for the residents of Palm Beach County is crucial to this task.

Current staffing levels and the need for additional equipment and chemicals limits the ability of local governments to operate an integrated program as required under Chapter 388, F.S. in protecting the public's health. Although separate state funding in recent years has allowed mosquito control agencies to address short-term needs, a continued dedicated funding commitment from the state would allow for long-term program planning and ensure the availability of well-trained staff. Additionally, the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Service (FDACS), along with the Florida Department of Health (FDOH), provides invaluable support and coordination between the many mosquito control programs in the State. FDACS in particular has been outstanding in their efforts to provide training opportunities for mosquito control staff in order to maintain required licensing.

Efforts to build FDACS and Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) funded research capacity for operational mosquito control in the State have slowly made progress at the Florida Medical Entomology Laboratory (FMEL) in Vero Beach. Since the 2011 closure of the John Mulrennan Sr. Public Health Research and Education Center (PHEREC) in Panama City, the research capacity to investigate chemical and spray equipment innovations remains inadequate to the task of supporting Florida mosquito control programs.

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** increased state funding for mosquito control and the eradication of mosquito borne diseases.

## **DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION - LAND MANAGEMENT**

Palm Beach County and its municipalities manage approximately 49,215 acres of environmentally sensitive and other conservation lands within their Natural Area and Park properties. Statewide, local governments manage about 10% of all government-owned lands. The management of these lands requires a significant, on-going financial commitment from local governments. This is especially true in South Florida where the subtropical climate allows exotic plant and animal species to thrive and necessitates continual treatment to maintain Natural Areas and Parks in their natural or restored condition.

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** legislation that would help local governments fund vital land management activities within their Natural Area and Park properties. Such legislation may include, but is not limited to, adding land management to the types of activities funded by the Florida Communities Trust (Chapter 380, F.S.).

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** increased funding for the Local Trail Management Grant Program (aka Trail-Go) as established under F.S. 260.0145.

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** appropriations from the Land Acquisition Trust Fund for environmental restoration and land acquisition projects that benefit both the environment and residents of Palm Beach County. Such projects include, but are not limited to, those that: 1) restore, preserve and protect the Everglades and other South Florida ecosystems (Section 373.470, F.S.); 2) restore, preserve and protect the Lake Okeechobee watershed (Section 373.4595, F.S.) , including the “downstream” Lake Worth Lagoon; 3) improve or protect water quality; 4) enhance flood protection; and/or 5) enhance water supplies.

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** inclusion of the Loxahatchee River Watershed Restoration Plan (part of the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan, as amended) and Lake Worth Lagoon (a regionally significant estuary) in legislation establishing dedicated funding sources for the Land Acquisition Trust Fund. Applicable legislation may include, but is not limited to, Section 373.470, F. S. (Everglades Restoration); Section 373.4595, F.S. (Northern Everglades and Estuaries Protection Program); and Subsections 373.4592(2)(j), F.S., and 373.4592(3), F.S. (Long-Term Plan).

Palm Beach County will **MONITOR** the State’s efforts to purchase Pal-Mar lands under the Florida Forever program, and will seek opportunities to move the project higher on the program’s Partnerships & Regional Incentives priority list.

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** the full funding of the Florida Forever Plan positively impacting Florida’s environmental sustainability and future generations of Floridians.

## **WATER QUALITY IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMS AND PROJECTS**

Water quality is vital to the ecological and economic health of Palm Beach County. The Florida Department of Environmental Protection is charged with identifying water quality problems and developing and implementing strategies to address those problems. Cyanobacteria, or “blue green algae,” on Lake Okeechobee and connected waterways is a significant issue, resulting in serious impacts to water quality, public health, and economic viability of local businesses. As a result, there is a renewed focus by the State

of Florida on reducing nutrient inputs to impacted water bodies and priority projects. Methods for reducing nutrients are expected to be identified and funded in partnership with local, state, and federal entities.

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** appropriations to provide for vital water quality improvement programs and projects, including funding for planning and monitoring, to address nutrient pollution and harmful algal blooms, that impact the County's lakes, canals, and estuaries. Septic to sewer conversions, improving storm water management systems, and innovative technologies to mitigate or cleanup harmful algal blooms are examples of projects that can reduce damaging freshwater discharges and improve the water quality of discharges to the Lake Worth Lagoon. Additionally, Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** legislation to provide for effective programs and projects to further address water quality impacts.

### **SEPTIC TO SEWER CONVERSION**

There are 51,320 septic residential properties in Palm Beach County, 29,959 of which are within the PBC Water Utility Department service area. Of those 29,959 properties, 12,906 are residential properties less than 1 acre. Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** state funding assistance and grants to local governments, wastewater utilities and property owners to assist in implementing and expediting septic to sewer conversion projects to mitigate the impacts of excess nutrients on water bodies.

### **CORAL REEF PROTECTION**

In 2014, a coral disease outbreak of unknown origin was found offshore of Miami-Dade County. This disease has since spread through all of Florida's Coral Reef and to reefs in the Caribbean. With high rates of disease transmission and rapid mortality impacts, the disease has affected nearly 50 percent of Florida's reef-building coral species including five listed under the Endangered Species Act. This disease along with coral bleaching events that have been occurring annually since 2011 are just a sample of the many threats to our fragile reef ecosystems that support Florida's fisheries and protect our coasts.

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** continued efforts and dedicated, recurring funding for the Florida Department of Environmental Protection to protect, restore, and recover Florida's Coral Reef.

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** assigning dedicated staff and budget for the newly established Kristin Jacobs Coral Reef Ecosystem Conservation Area Aquatic Preserve, the northernmost section of Florida's Coral Reef, which runs 105 miles from the St. Lucie Inlet to the northern boundary of Biscayne National Park.

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** funding for scientific studies to determine the biological tolerances of coral species to turbidity as part of an effort to refine the Water Quality Standards to protect sensitive corals and hardbottom communities.

Palm Beach County **OPPOSES** any changes of the statewide turbidity criterion that could compromise critical shore protection efforts along the coastline without a comprehensive scientific understanding of the biological tolerances for coral species of concern.

## **PETROLEUM STORAGE TANK COMPLIANCE LOCAL PROGRAM FUNDING**

Since 1988, Palm Beach County has contracted with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) to administer the Petroleum Storage Tank Compliance Verification Program for Palm Beach, Martin, and St. Lucie Counties. During 2012, FDEP reduced the program budget by approximately 35%, which resulted in the facility inspection frequency being reduced to once every 24-30 months instead of annually. The rationale behind this reduction was that all petroleum storage tank systems are now double walled and less likely to leak, therefore requiring less frequent inspections. The reality is:

- Many of these double-walled petroleum storage tanks systems have exceeded their warranty life, which makes them more susceptible to failures. These failures are increasing the number of variable component and entire system closure and installation inspections.
- Historical inspection records show that as tank systems age, equipment failures and maintenance issues occur more frequently. These issues are only discovered by regular site inspections. The October 2018 regulation revisions provided timeframes for testing of equipment and recordkeeping. However, these requirements are not satisfied until the inspector arrives at the site, creating a situation where the facility is out of compliance.
- Reduced inspection frequencies greatly increases the chances for petroleum discharges as equipment failures and maintenance issues to persist for longer periods before being discovered by inspectors, as there are facilities that wait until the inspector arrives before conducting maintenance or testing.

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** sufficient funding of the Division of Waste Management Long Range Plan from the Inland Protection Trust Fund and other potential sources to continue local Petroleum Storage Tank Compliance Verification Programs. A funding level that adjusts for inflation and facilitates the return of annual facility inspections is necessary, as well as an increase in contract rates for variable inspections. The Storage Tank Compliance Program provides the first line of defense for protecting the State's drinking water supplies and early detection of leaks prevents costly cleanup efforts by the property owner.

## **STATE PETROLEUM CLEAN UP PROGRAM**

Palm Beach County's local petroleum cleanup program provides technical oversight and management of state contractors conducting assessment and remediation of petroleum contamination within the County to support development of impacted properties and protect local drinking water supplies. The program also provides enforcement and oversight for non-eligible contamination cleanups. The County has a dedicated team of experienced professionals, which include Professional Geologists, Hydrogeologists, Environmental Analysts, and Professional Engineers to oversee the many phases of the cleanup process in a timely and cost-effective manner. Palm Beach County's Department of Environmental Resources Management implements the program throughout the County and is committed to assisting the State's strategic direction to continue to assess all remaining discharges.

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** increased funding for the Division of Waste Management Long Range Program Plan from the Inland Protection Trust Fund and other potential to continue the restoration of contaminated sites by local Petroleum Restoration Programs (PRP). The Palm Beach County Local Cleanup Program is

committed to assisting the PRP strategic direction to continue to assess all remaining discharges.

Currently, the FL Division of Waste Management does not credit local programs for efforts associated with site inspections that do not require a defined deliverable. As a result, local programs are required to return State funds associated with these sites at the termination of the Task Assignment, eliminating compensation to local programs for any efforts necessary to research the site and conduct an inspection. Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** site inspections performed by the local programs to be considered a deliverable by the Division of Waste Management to ensure local programs can be compensated for any efforts associated with assessing contaminated sites that are assigned by the State.

### **STATEMENT OF AFFILIATION: SOUTHEAST FLORIDA REGIONAL CLIMATE CHANGE COMPACT**

Southeast Florida is one of the most vulnerable areas in the country to climate change and sea level rise. Recognizing their shared challenges, Palm Beach, Broward, Miami-Dade and Monroe Counties (Compact Counties) adopted the Southeast Florida Regional Climate Change Compact (Compact) in 2010. The Compact includes a commitment to develop and advocate for joint state and federal legislative policies. Accordingly, the Compact Counties have adopted a State Legislative Program each year since 2011. The Compact Counties and other organizations adopting this document recognize that the local impacts of global climate change are among the greatest challenges facing southeast Florida in the present and future. Consequently, adapting to climate impacts, mitigating additional damage by reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and building community and economic resilience are among the highest priorities for action at all levels of government.

As a member, Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** the Southeast Florida Regional Climate Change Compact 2024 State Climate, Energy and Resilience Legislative Priorities and Principles unless issues specifically conflict with Palm Beach County's position. The 2025 priorities are as follows:

**OPPOSE** state preemption of local governments' programs, policies, and regulation that would compromise home rule authority to appropriately build resilience, respond to and manage the threats of climate change.

**SUPPORT** legislation, policies, programs, funding, rebates and incentives that expand renewable energy, energy conservation and efficiency opportunities, and related workforce development, including the adoption of meaningful energy efficiency programs and goals.

**SUPPORT** higher energy, water, and resilience standards for new and existing buildings to prepare for and lessen the impacts of future climate conditions through legislation, including the adoption of such standards into the energy and building codes by the Florida Building Commission, and enhanced powers for local governments to enact local building code amendments.

**SUPPORT** legislation, appropriations, and implementing authority of state agencies to accept and leverage federal funds to the benefit of local government for the purposes of increasing resilience and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

**SUPPORT** the full funding of local match and coordination between the South Florida Water Management District and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers of the Central and Southern Florida Flood Risk Resilience Studies.

**SUPPORT** the affordability, access, coverage, and continued reform of hazard and windstorm insurance offered within and by the State of Florida, through improved collaboration and data sharing with respect to implemented wind and flood mitigation measures between insurers, state and local governments, greater risk disclosure and transparency related to premium calculations.

**SUPPORT** full funding of resilient infrastructure projects identified under the state’s Resilient Florida program and significant additional investments in resilience planning and resilient infrastructure, including consideration of formulas to distribute state funding to local governments, water management districts, and regional resilience entities, and a consideration to lower the current match requirement.

### **MODIFICATION OF THE STATEWIDE RECYCLING GOAL**

The Florida Legislature through the Energy, Climate Change and Economic Security Act of 2008, established a statewide weight-based recycling goal of 75% by 2020. Although the legislation does not directly address a recycling goal beyond 2020, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) has communicated its expectation that counties continue to work toward a 75% recycling goal within the same parameters established in the sunsetted legislation.

The FDEP’s 2023 Total Recycling Credits report shows the state’s recycling effort was calculated at 49% (despite the efforts of counties like Palm Beach County that was able to achieve a state-leading calculated effort of 84%). Changes to collection methods, shifts in recycling markets including regulatory changes in international demand markets, and the use of lighter weight packaging have significantly impaired the ability of counties to meet the statutory weight-based goal.

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** the development of a new recycling goal that incorporates input from all counties, as it is the counties that have a statutory obligation to implement and finance such a goal.

### **LITHIUM BATTERY REGULATION**

Lithium batteries, if not disposed of properly, are known to cause fires in waste collection vehicles as well as in waste and recycling facilities.

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** legislation that would help ensure the proper disposal of lithium batteries to keep waste workers, and the facilities in which they work, safer.

### **EXPANSION OF RECLAIMED WATER**

As Florida continues to experience population growth and increasing demands on the water resources of the state, the efficient and effective utilization of reclaimed water is vital to expanding the water pie and providing for the increased impacts of our growth. Over the past few years, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, the Water Management Districts, industry groups including the Florida Water

and Environment Association Utility Council (FWEAUC), and multiple stakeholder groups have engaged in several efforts to improve legislative and regulatory requirements regarding the oversight and funding for alternative water supply projects. These stakeholders are engaged in the Potable Reuse Commission, which is looking to incorporate legislative and regulatory language regarding potable reuse water into the existing frameworks utilized for reclaimed water. Additional policy concepts include the clarification of the applicability of impact offset and substitution credits to alternative water supply projects, incentivizing approaches that promote efficiency in the utilization of reclaimed water, and other measures that will allow for the utilization of reclaimed water in the best time, place and manner as suits a given geographic area and local government.

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** the legislative concepts proposed by the FWEAUC and concepts offered by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection and other stakeholders that will promote project development and the continued effective and efficient use of reclaimed water throughout Palm Beach County.

### **ALTERNATIVE WATER SUPPLY, WATER RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE FUNDING**

In 2005, the State Legislature enacted the Water Protection & Sustainability Program, requiring the regional water supply planning function of the water management districts to promote alternative water supply projects and enhance the state's water supplies. At the beginning of each fiscal year revenues were to be distributed by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection into the alternative water supply trust fund accounts created by each water management district. A total of \$100 million was established in recurring funding. The funds were to be used to assist in funding alternative water supply construction costs selected by each District's Governing Board for priority implementation. In 2022, \$125 million from the Water Protection and Sustainability Task Force was provided for the Wastewater Grant Program.

As water and wastewater infrastructure ages, it becomes necessary to repair or replace aged components of the water infrastructure framework, as well as to integrate innovative technologies and approaches to provide high quality water and wastewater service. In its most recent Drinking Water Infrastructure Needs Survey and Assessment, the United States Environmental Protection Agency identified significant infrastructure Repairs and Replacements (R+R) that will be required in the decades ahead. The assessment identified nearly \$17 billion worth of upgrades needed in Florida. Provision of high quality water and wastewater service provides basic building blocks for economic sustainability and advancement. Municipal and County governments will require assistance from State and Federal sources to tackle these growing challenges.

The Department of Environmental Protection is currently administrating a Reclaimed Water Work Group that is developing recommendations on a number of policy and funding issues relating to reclaimed water and associated projects, including funding mechanisms to restore funding for alternative water supply and reuse projects.

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** restoring previous alternative water supply, water resource development and reclaimed water/reuse funding through existing mechanisms and the creation new statewide funding programs to provide substantial and perennial funding to:

- Enhance regional and local water resource and supply capacity development.
- Provide adequate and reliable long-term funding for water and wastewater infrastructure.
- Provide funding for alternative water supply development.
- Provide funding for water quality protection and treatment of impaired waters.
- Establish a system for prioritizing water resource projects to ensure that funding is utilized in the most efficient manner available.

### **UTILITY WORKER SAFETY**

Currently, Florida Statutes provide for the reclassification of the misdemeanor or felony degree of specified assault and battery offenses when those offenses are knowingly committed against law enforcement officers, firefighters, and other specified persons and emergency responders engaged in the lawful performance of their duties. The effect of this reclassification is that the maximum penalty increases. Proposed legislation, as filed in previous sessions, would add utility workers (a term defined in the bill) to the list of specified persons and recognize them as first responders in emergency scenarios. Therefore, the felony or misdemeanor degree of certain assault and battery offenses would be reclassified if committed against a utility worker engaged in the lawful performance of his or her duties in the same manner as if those offenses were committed against a law enforcement officer or firefighter engaged in the lawful performance of his or her duties.

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** legislation that would reclassify certain assault and battery offenses committed against a utility worker engaged in the lawful performance of their duties in the same manner as if those offenses were committed against a law enforcement officer engaged in the lawful performance of their duties.

### **DERELICT VESSEL / FLOATING STRUCTURE REMOVAL**

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** continued recurring appropriations to assist local governments in removing derelict vessels that degrade the marine environment and block the use of public shorelines, berthing facilities, docks, ramps and staging areas.

Floating structures are expressly excluded from the definition of the term “vessel” as defined in Section 327.02(46) F.S., are not regulated by the State nor is any funding assistance available for removal of floating structures by local entities. Without any statutory regulations, floating structures are managed through a mosaic of local ordinances with varying enforcement practices across jurisdictional boundaries. The potential for legal challenges created by the local inconsistencies, along with no State funding mechanism to support enforcement, inhibits all efforts to protect waterways from the adverse impacts associated with the growing number of these structures.

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** statutory language regulating nuisance floating structures that can impact sensitive aquatic ecosystems and become unmoored during storms causing damage to private property,

waterfront businesses, navigational aids and bridge infrastructure.

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** collaborative efforts between state and local law enforcement agencies to implement state or local regulations associated with floating structures.

#### **FLORIDA RECREATION DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM**

The Florida Department of Environmental Protection administers the Florida Recreation Development Assistance Program (FRDAP). This program is a competitive grant program that provides financial assistance through grants to local governments for the acquisition and development of land for public outdoor recreation purposes. This grant program has two funding thresholds, the Large Project Fund provides grants of up to \$200,000, and the Small Project Fund provides grants of up to \$50,000. In recent legislative sessions, appropriations have been focused on the Small Project Fund, as well as special projects targeted at access for disabled persons and other specialized issues, with few projects off the Large Project List being funded.

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** efforts to increase the cap on the amount of funding awarded to a project through the Florida Recreation Development Assistance Program.

Palm Beach County **SUPPORTS** appropriations that provide for the funding of the FRDAP Large Project Development list, in addition to those on the Small Project Fund list.

## **APPROPRIATION REQUESTS**

### **PALM BEACH COUNTY**

Australian Avenue Road and Drainage Improvements	\$2,500,000
Fire Rescue Water Vessels for Hazard Mitigation	\$200,000
Morikami Museum and Japanese Gardens “Bridge to Heaven” Design	\$500,000
Peanut Island Historic Restoration	\$2,000,000
Palm Beach County Affordable Housing Initiative	\$2,550,000
Palm Tran Patriot Passes Pilot Program	\$150,000
RESTORE Re-Entry Program	\$500,000

### **LAKE WORTH LAGOON INITIATIVE**

Lake Worth Lagoon System Assessment – Palm Beach County	\$154,500
9 <sup>th</sup> Avenue South Outfall Restoration – City of Lake Worth Beach	\$371,250

### **LOXAHATCHEE RIVER PRESERVATION INITIATIVE**

Daniels Way Water Quality Improvements – Town of Jupiter	\$103,500
Loxahatchee River Headwaters Easement Mapping – South Indian River Water Control District	\$75,000
Loxahatchee Slough Habitat Restoration Phase II – Palm Beach County	\$180,000

### **SUPPORT**

South Florida Agricenter and Emergency Shelter at the South Florida Fairgrounds  
Let’s Move 365