

PBC Legislative Update



FEBRUARY 10, 2014

VOLUME 7 NUMBER 3

IN THIS ISSUE:

February 3-7 Committee Week Update

STATE ISSUES

1. **Water**
2. **Gaming**
3. **DRIs**
4. **Public Retirement Plans**
5. **Communication Services Tax**
6. **Prescription Drug Monitoring Program**
7. **Juvenile Justice Sentences**
8. **Flood Insurance**
9. **Flagler Memorial Statute**

FEDERAL ISSUES

1. **SBA Disaster Declaration**
2. **FY 2014 Federal Appropriations**
3. **Flood Insurance Rate Delay Passes Senate**
4. **Rubio, Warren Legislation to Protect Vets from Financial Scams**

UPCOMING 2014 SESSION DATES

February 3-7 Committee Week Update

State Issues

Water

By: Anfield Consultants

In comments during committee week, Speaker Will Weatherford indicated that this year, there likely will be spending on water issues, mainly focused on Indian River Lagoon, Everglades and Lake Okeechobee cleanup, but that the larger water problems and policies likely will wait until next session. He indicated that the Legislature is likely to "tee up" some policy, but that the larger policy initiatives probably will come next session, under Speaker Crisafulli and President Gardiner.

Both the House and Senate have discussed criteria for "water projects" for this year's budget, and the County is actively preparing the needed documentation, submitting the proposals, and working with our legislative delegation to advocate for inclusion of our projects in the budget.

Gaming

By: Corcoran & Johnston and Ericks Consultants

The Senate Committee on Gaming began discussions of what they would like to see included in a comprehensive gaming bill. The committee discussed items such as: establishing a Gaming Commission, how the Commission would be appointed, and what authority it would have; the effect that authorization of limited gaming expansion would have on the Seminole Compact; decoupling live racing; destination casinos and pari-mutuel parity; and including a constitutional amendment to require voter approval of expansion. Chairman Richter discussed the possibility of one opening up in Miami and/or one in Broward County. All members of the Committee expressed their dislike of the idea of unlimited destination casino resorts. He also reminded the committee that the Seminole Tribe has been a "very good partner" to the State and that fair negotiations would be required. Chairman Richter addressed the concern of live racing requirements. He proposed eliminating or reducing such regulations, which would let operators choose whether or not to conduct live races based on the market. He also discussed the requirement of injury reporting at horse and dog track which, according to Senator Sachs, continues to be a larger issue.

The Chairman originally announced that a draft bill would be published for discussion February 10th. However, he announced on Friday that he did not feel the committee had had enough discussion, and that the draft would not be released for another two weeks. Meanwhile, Speaker Weatherford told the Miami Herald that he was open to considering limited gaming expansion in Broward and Miami-Dade so long as the Seminole Compact was renegotiated this year (one year earlier than it is currently set to expire) and that a Constitutional amendment is placed on the ballot to allow voters to determine whether expansion takes place or not in the future.

Developments of Regional Impact (SB 372)

By: Anfield Consultants and Corcoran & Johnston

Background: In F.S., developments of regional impact are defined as developments "which, because of its character, magnitude, or location, would have a substantial effect upon the health, safety, or welfare of citizens of more than one county." By Florida law developments identified as being of regional impact must be reviewed by state and regional authorities under the coordination of Regional Planning Councils (RPCs), as well as by the DEO.

However, the law does also provide exemptions from DRI review. One of these exemptions is for developments that are located within a Dense Urban Land Area (DULA). Under current statute, the following may qualify DULAs:

Any municipality with an average of at least 1,000 people per square mile of land area and a minimum total population of at least 5,000.

Any county, including the municipalities located in the county, that:

1. Has an average of at least 1,000 people per square mile of land area and is located within an urban service area has been adopted into the local comprehensive plan.
2. Is not located within an urban service area, but has a population of at least 900,000 with an average of at least 1,000 people per square mile.
3. Has a population of at least 1 million and is located within an urban service area.

Proposed Changes: This bill would delete two of these qualifying exemptions, namely the exemption for counties that have a density of 1,000 people per sq. mile and are which are located within an urban service area, as well as the exemption for counties that have a population of 900,000, but are not located within an urban service area. They would be replaced by a new exemption that would cover developments within any county that has a population of at least 300,000 with an average density of no less than 400 people per square mile. Under the current criteria, eight counties and 242 municipalities are designated as DULAs. With these new criteria, that number could increase to 15 counties and 262 municipalities, since municipalities located within a county that meets the new criteria would also be included.

Update: On Tuesday, the Senate Community Affairs Committee passed **SB 372** without amendment. It will next go before the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation, Tourism, & Economic Development. Its House companion, **HB 241**, is currently in the House Economic Development & Tourism Subcommittee.

Public Retirement Plans

By: Corcoran & Johnston

The Senate Community Affairs Committee considered SB 388, relating to Public Retirement Plans, by Senator Bean. The bill provides that a consolidated government that has entered into an interlocal agreement to provide police protection services to another incorporated municipality is eligible to receive the premium taxes reported for the other municipality under certain circumstances

The bill authorizes the municipality receiving the police protection services to enact an ordinance levying the premium tax as provided by law and to distribute those premium tax revenues reported for the municipality to the consolidated government, as long as the interlocal agreement is in effect.

Communications Services Taxes

By: Corcoran & Johnston and Ericks Consultants

Tuesday, the Senate Communications, Energy & Public Utilities Committee heard SB 266, relating to Communications Services Taxes, by Senator Hukill. This bill reduces the communications services tax (CST) rates by two percent, reducing the general rate from 6.65 percent to 4.65 percent and the rate on direct-to-home satellite from 10.8 percent to 8.8 percent. The bill also makes conforming changes to the statutes that authorize a communications services dealer to collect one combined rate that includes both the CST and the gross receipts tax to reflect this two percent reduction in the communications service tax. The bill was amended to ensure that the percentage distributed to local governments remained the same and clarify that the cut was prospective rather than retroactive. The 2% cut would still mean an estimated \$90 million reduction in State revenue within its first year and \$31 million dollar annual impact to all local governments statewide (\$11million for the first year). Public testimony followed the voting on amendments. Six separate entities waved in support of the bill, including Comcast, Sprint and the Florida Chamber. The Florida League of Cities did have a concern with the bill, which stemmed from the fact that all counties and cities would feel a loss of \$31 million overall. The bill faced no debate after public testimony, and was passed unanimously. The bill has two more committees before going before the full Senate and does not yet have a House companion.

Prescription Drug Monitoring Program

By: Corcoran & Johnston

On Tuesday, the Senate Health Policy Committee considered multiple proposed committee bills. The first was SPB 7014, relating to Prescription Drug Monitoring Program. The bill strengthens the security of personal identifying information in the Prescription Drug Monitoring Program Database (PDMP) by requiring law enforcement agencies to obtain a subpoena from a court prior to receiving confidential information from the PDMP and requiring recipients of PDMP confidential information to take steps to ensure the continued confidentiality of the information received.

The proposed bill also allows health care practitioners to share a patient's PDMP information with that patient and, upon the patient's written consent, put that information in the patient's medical record.

Two amendments to the bill adopted unanimously allow the Department of Health to inform practitioners and law enforcement when they determine there exists a pattern of abuse by a patient pursuant to rules developed by the Department.

Senator Sobel had concerns that the bill will give criminals notice that the police are investigating them and they will flee, which will hamper the efforts and progress the PDMP has made over the past 10 years.

The bill passed favorably by committee on a 7-2 vote with Senator Sobel and Senator Grimsley dissenting.

The next was SPB 7016, also relating to the Prescription Drug Monitoring Program. This bill requires law enforcement agencies to submit a subpoena to obtain personal medical records. Obtaining a subpoena may be done in the case of reasonable suspicion of criminal activity and may not be obtained unless law enforcement identifies a credible threat. In his explanation of the bill Senator Bean stated that PDMP information had been inappropriately released and caused the committee to review and consider how safe PDMP health records are.

Advocacy groups, like the Florida Sheriffs Association, within the law enforcement sector have voiced strong opposition to this bill, citing the fact that this will hinder law enforcements ability to effectively locate criminals. The bill was amended at the meeting and the bill would now elevate the legal standard to acquire PDMP information through a court order (higher than subpoena) to even further safeguard the medical records of Floridians.

The bill passed favorably on a 7-2 vote.

Juvenile Sentencing

By: County Staff and Florida News Service

The House Criminal Justice Subcommittee passed a juvenile sentencing bill Wednesday a day after a Senate committee approved a similar measure. Both bills aim to align state policy with two major U.S. Supreme Court rulings. The Legislature has been trying to pass a juvenile sentencing law since 2010, when the court ruled in a case known as *Graham v. Florida* that life sentences without the possibility of parole are unconstitutional for juveniles convicted of non-homicide crimes. That decision was followed in 2012 by a case known as *Miller v. Alabama*, in which the Supreme Court ruled that juveniles convicted of murder can still face life sentences, but judges must weigh criteria such as the offenders' maturity and the nature of the crimes before imposing the sentences. The House bill (PCB CRJS 14-08) attempts to comply with those rulings by setting guidelines based on the severity of crimes. For example, in the most-severe murder cases, known as capital felonies, juvenile offenders could receive life sentences. If judges determine life sentences are not appropriate, the juveniles would have to be sentenced to at least 30 years in prison. The bill includes different guidelines for other types of murder cases and serious non-homicide crimes. The House proposal is considered less restrictive than the Senate measure (SB 384). Both sponsors of the House and Senate bill expressed their willingness to collectively draft compromise language to pass this year.

Expansion of Private Flood Insurance

By: County Staff and Florida News Service

In response to thousands of coastal residents facing potentially higher flood-insurance rates, legislation aiming to attract more private insurers to offer flood coverage in Florida has been making its way through the legislature.

(SB 542), sponsor Jeff Brandes, passed the Senate General Appropriations Committee on Thursday with the caveat that it would go back to the Banking and Insurance Committee for further review.

The bill is intended to provide "flexibility" to homeowners now covered through the National Flood Insurance Program and to open the Florida market to companies offering private insurance coverage.

Among the changes added or redefined on Thursday: Homeowners would be able to negotiate rates without private carriers needing the state Office of Insurance Regulation's consent; commercial coverage would be excluded; and flood coverage could be limited to the principal building or the amount of a property owner's outstanding mortgage.

Also, rules would be eased for surplus-line carriers, which offer higher risk alternative types of coverage to people who can't get standard coverage and whose claims are not guaranteed by the Florida Insurance Guaranty Association if a company goes bankrupt.

The changes to the bill came two days after the U.S. House rejected the latest attempt to delay most of the rate hikes in the National Flood Insurance Program for four years.

Real estate and business leaders have claimed there could be a potentially cataclysmic hit to the state's real-estate market as rates go up because of changes approved in the federal 2012 Biggert-Waters Flood Insurance Reform Act.

Florida accounts for about 2 million policies in the federal program, with state staff estimating that about 268,500 policies receive subsidized rates.

Some properties, primarily in the Tampa-St. Petersburg and Southeast Florida markets, have been projected to face the biggest hikes, as the rates in the federal program are made actuarially sound.

FLAGLER MEMORIAL BILL

By: Ericks Consultants

A proposed bill SB 250, by Senator Joseph Abruzzo that would allow a privately funded memorial honoring Henry Morrison Flagler to be erected in the Capitol courtyard advanced through its second of four committee stops in the Senate. The House companion (HB 131) by State Rep. Bill Hager has yet to be slated for any of its three scheduled committees of reference.

Federal Issues

SBA Disaster Declaration

By: Becker & Poliakoff

Florida residents and businesses affected by the severe storms, heavy rain, strong winds and flooding on Jan. 9 - 10 can apply for low-interest disaster loans from the U.S. Small Business Administration.

Acting Administrator Hulit made the loans available in response to a letter from Gov. Rick Scott on Jan. 28, requesting a disaster declaration by the SBA. The declaration covers Palm Beach County and the adjacent counties of Broward, Glades, Hendry, Martin and Okeechobee in Florida.

Loans up to \$200,000 are available to homeowners to repair or replace damaged or destroyed real estate. Homeowners and renters are eligible for loans up to \$40,000 to repair or replace damaged or destroyed personal property. SBA's customer service representatives are available at the Disaster Loan Outreach Center to answer questions about the disaster loan program and help individuals complete their applications.

Businesses and non-profit organizations of any size may borrow up to \$2 million to repair or replace damaged or destroyed real estate, machinery and equipment, inventory, and other business assets.

The Center is located at the following address:

Palm Beach County

Hagen Ranch Road Branch Library

14350 Hagen Ranch Road

Delray Beach, Florida 33446

Opens: Wednesday, Feb. 5, 9 a.m.

Hours: Wednesday, Feb. 5 through Thursday, Feb. 13, 9 a.m. - 6 p.m.; Saturday, Feb. 8, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. (closed Sunday)

Closing: Thursday, Feb. 13, at close of business

Interest rates are as low as 2.25 percent for homeowners and renters, 2.625 percent for non-profit organizations and 4 percent for businesses with terms up to 30 years. Loan amounts and terms are set by the SBA and are based on each applicant's financial condition.

The filing deadline to return applications for physical property damage is **March 31, 2014**. The deadline to return economic injury applications is **October 30, 2014**.

Fiscal Year 2014 Federal Appropriations

By: Alcalde & Faye

On January 17th, the President approved H.R. 3547, The Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2014, which incorporates all 12 annual appropriations bills into one "Omnibus" bill and funds the government through the remainder of Fiscal Year (FY) 2014. The Omnibus bill is reflective of the budget agreement that passed in December that set overall discretionary spending levels for FY 2014 and 2015 and partially restored funding cut by sequestration. The measure would provide a 2.6 percent increase in discretionary spending from the \$986.3 billion, sequester-set level for FY 2013. Under pressure from leadership, the measure keeps a tight rein on new funding and effectively freezes appropriations for President Obama's healthcare program at the reduced, post-sequester level.

Proposed funding levels for programs generally of interest to local governments have been highlighted below.

Department of Agriculture

The bill provides \$20.9 billion in discretionary funding for the Department of Agriculture, \$350 million above the FY 2013 enacted level.

Water and Waste Disposal Program

\$1.752 billion, \$248 million above FY 2013 for the water and waste disposal program, which provides loans and grants to assist communities in obtaining clean water and sanitary waste disposal systems.

Community Facilities Program

\$2.288 billion to assist rural communities with essential community facilities, including: hospitals, schools, health clinics, libraries, day care centers, public safety buildings and equipment.

Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)

\$6.7 billion, \$153 million below the FY 2013 enacted level, to provide supplemental nutritional foods needed by pregnant and nursing mothers, babies and young children.

Child Nutrition Programs

\$19.3 billion is included in required mandatory funding for child nutrition programs. Within this account, \$25 million is directed to help schools purchase equipment required to operate the program. This funding will provide for an estimated 5.6 billion free or reduced-price school lunches and snacks for 32.1 million qualifying children.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

\$82.2 billion is included for SNAP, which provides food assistance to more than 47 million Americans on average every month.

Department of Health and Human Services

Administration for Children and Families (ACF)

\$30.9 billion, which is \$782 million above the FY 2013 enacted level, is included for ACF programs, including:

- \$3.4 billion for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) program;
- \$2.3 billion for the Child Care and Development Block Grant program; and
- \$710 million for the Community Services Block Grant program.

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration (SAMHSA)

\$3.6 billion is included for SAMHSA, which is an increase of \$144 million over the FY 2013 enacted level. This includes \$75 million for criminal justice activities, including drug courts. The Substance Abuse Block Grant program is funded at \$1.8 billion, a \$110 million increase over the FY 2013 post-sequester level.

Prevention and Public Health Fund

While the bill does provide \$1 billion for this Fund, as authorized in the Healthcare bill, all funding is redirected among several HHS programs aimed at preventing disease and improving health.

Administration for Community Living (ACL)

\$1.6 billion is included, which \$54 million over the FY 2013 enacted level. The ACL funds programs for the elderly and the disabled, and the allocation includes a \$41 million increase for the elderly nutrition programs, including the Home-Delivered Meals ("Meals on Wheels") program.

Community Health Centers

\$3.6 billion is included for Community Health Centers, a \$700 million increase over the FY 2013 level. This amount includes approximately \$350 million that will be used to create more than 450 new community health centers across the nation while expanding clinical services at existing health centers.

Department of Homeland Security

In total, the bill provides \$39.3 billion in discretionary funding for the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), a reduction of \$336 million compared to the FY 2013 enacted level.

FEMA State & Local Disaster Preparedness Programs

Within the \$2.5 billion included for first responder grants, \$1.5 billion is allocated for State and Local Preparedness grant programs, which includes the following:

- \$411.4 million for State Homeland Security Grants;
- \$587 million for the Urban Area Security Initiative;
- \$90 million for Transit and Rail Security Grants;
- \$100 million for Port Security grants;
- \$680 million for Assistance to Firefighter Grants; and
- \$350 million for Emergency Management Performance Grants.

Department of Housing and Urban Development

The legislation includes a total of \$32.8 billion for the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), a decrease of \$687 million below the FY 2013 enacted level.

Section 8 and Public Housing

\$26.3 billion is included for public housing programs, an increase of \$411 million above the FY 2013 enacted level. Within this total, the bill provides funding to continue assistance to 2.2 million families served by the Housing Choice Voucher program, and \$75 million for the President's new veterans' housing voucher program. Included within this amount is \$19.2 for Section 8 Tenant-Based Rental Assistance, and \$9.9 billion for Section 8 project-based rental assistance.

HOME Investments Partnerships Program

\$1 billion is included for the HOME Program to support the creation and rehabilitation of low-income housing across the country.

Choice Neighborhoods

\$90 million is included for the Choice Neighborhoods Initiative, which is \$24 million less than the FY 2013 enacted level. The program improves housing, revitalizes poor communities, and promotes better access to schools, transportation, and jobs.

Community Planning and Development

\$6.6 billion, \$145 million below the FY 2013 enacted level, is included for Community Planning and Development programs. Within this amount, \$3.03 billion is reserved for the **Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)** formula program, \$82 million above the FY 2013 enacted level.

Department of Interior

The legislation contains \$1.1 billion, \$44 million above the FY 2013 enacted level, for the Department of the Interior, including the Bureau of Reclamation.

Land and Water Conservation Fund

\$306 million to provide funding and matching grants to federal, state and local governments for the acquisition of land and water, and easements on land and water.

Department of Justice

The bill provides \$27.4 billion, an increase of \$338 million of the FY 2013 enacted level, to support critical investigation, law enforcement and prosecution activities. This amount includes a total of \$23 billion for State & Local Law Enforcement Programs, which is \$32 million above FY 2013 enacted level.

Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS)

\$214 million is included to enhance community policing by sharing information and making grants to state and local law enforcement agencies, including \$180 million for the COPS Hiring Program.

Office of Violence Against Women

\$417 million is included for OVW programs, which reduce violence against women and administer justice for and strengthen services to victims of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking.

Byrne Justice Assistance Grants

\$376 million is included for Byrne grants, which provide state and local governments with critical funding necessary to support a range of program areas including, but not limited to, law enforcement, crime prevention and education, corrections, drug treatment and enforcement, planning, technology improvement, and crime victim and witness initiatives.

State Criminal Alien Assistance Program

\$180 million is allocated for the SCAAP program, through which Federal payments are made to states and local governments for reimbursement of officer salary costs incurred as a result of incarcerating undocumented criminal aliens.

New Comprehensive School Safety Initiative

The bill includes \$75 million for a new school safety initiative to be developed by the DOJ's National Institute of Justice. The explanatory statement accompanying the bill describes the new program as an initiative that would "bring together the Nation's best minds to research the root causes of school violence, develop technologies and strategies for increasing school safety."

Department of Labor

The bill provides \$12 billion for the Department of Labor (DOL), \$449 million below the FY 2013 enacted level.

Employment Training Administration

\$10.4 billion, a decrease of \$562 million from the FY 2013 enacted level, is provided for high quality job training, employment, labor market information, and income maintenance services.

Workforce Investment Act State Grants

\$2.58 billion is included for federal job training programs as well as a new, comprehensive customer-focused workforce investment system.

Job Corps

\$1.7 billion, \$14 million less than the FY 2013 enacted level, is provided to help unemployed, young Americans receive education, job training, and employment assistance.

Veterans Employment and Training Service (VETS)

\$269.5 million, which is \$5.1 million above the FY 2013 enacted level, is included for VETS. This includes \$14 million for the Transition Assistance Program to help new veterans receive training for civilian employment and job search assistance.

Department of Transportation

The bill includes \$17.8 billion in discretionary appropriations, \$164 million below the FY 2013 enacted level. Key program funding includes:

TIGER Discretionary Program

\$600 million is provided for TIGER grants, which is \$126 million more than the FY 2013 level.

Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)

\$41 billion in obligation limitation funding for the Federal Highway program, which reflects level authorized in the MAP-21 transportation authorization legislation.

Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)

\$12.4 billion is provided for the FAA, \$168 million below the FY 2013 enacted level, to support the full operations of the air traffic control system, including the hiring and training of air traffic controllers and safety inspectors. Funding is preserved for the FAA's Next Generation air transportation systems (NextGen), and \$3.35 billion in "obligation limitation" funding is provided for airport construction projects. However the omnibus bill does not include the Administration's proposals for new passenger facility fees.

Federal Railroad Administration (FRA)

\$1.6 billion is provided for FRA programs, which \$34.6 million below the FY 2013 enacted level for railroad assistance and rail safety programs. Also no funding is provided for High Speed Rail initiatives.

Federal Transit Administration (FTA)

\$2.15 billion, a decrease of \$100 million below the FY 2013 enacted level, is included for FTA programs. The bill allows \$8.6 billion in state and local transit grant funding from the Mass Transit Account of the Highway Trust Fund, which is consistent with MAP-21, in order to help local communities build, maintain, and ensure the safety of their mass transit systems.

\$1.942 billion is provided for Capital Investment Grants ("New Starts"), full funding for state and local "Small Starts," and funding for all current "Full Funding Grant Agreement" projects. When combined with available prior year transit funds, \$2.132 billion is available for all New Start programs.

Other Agencies

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

The Army Corps of Engineers is funded at \$5.5 billion, an increase of \$487 million above the FY 2013 enacted level, focusing funding on navigation and flood control projects to advance public safety, boost U.S. export ability, create jobs, and help ensure our waterways stay open for business. Within the total, the bill provides: \$642 million above the request for essential flood control and navigation projects; \$2.3 billion for navigation projects and studies; more than \$1 billion in funding from the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund; and \$1.6 billion for public health and flood and storm damage reduction activities, including \$247 million for critical dam safety improvements.

The bill includes \$75 million for Shore Protection. The Palm Beach County Shore Protection project is eligible for the Shore Protection funding.

Economic Development Administration (EDA)

The bill provides \$247 million, \$28 million more than the FY 2013 enacted level, for investments that will leverage regional assets to support the implementation of regional economic development strategies designed to create jobs, leverage private capital, and encourage economic development.

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

The bill provides \$8.2 billion for the EPA, which is \$143 million below the FY 2013 enacted level, and includes approximately \$2.35 billion for the Clean Water and Drinking Water State Revolving Funds, which provides grants to states for local drinking water and sewer construction projects.

Flood Insurance Rate Delay Passes Senate

By: Miami-Dade OIA

The Senate overwhelmingly approved legislation, S. 1926 by Senator Robert Menendez (D-NJ), that would delay most of the flood insurance premium increases associated



Palm Beach County

Board of County

Commissioners

Priscilla A. Taylor, Mayor

Paulette Burdick, Vice Mayor

Hal R. Valeche

Shelley Vana

Steven L. Abrams

Mary Lou Berger

Jess R. Santamaria

County Administrator

Robert Weisman

**Palm Beach County
Legislative Affairs**

301 North Olive Avenue
Suite 1101.4
West Palm Beach, FL
33405

**Todd J. Bonlarron
Director**

Phone
Office (561) 355-3451
Mobile (561) 310-7832

Fax
(561) 355-3982

E-mail
tbonlarr@pbcgov.com

We're on the Web!
www.pbcgov.com

with the Biggert-Waters Act until after a study on flood insurance affordability can be conducted by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to guarantee the flood maps are accurate. That study and congressional review are expected to take roughly four years.

The measure now moves to the House, where further consideration in a timely manner is less certain as House leaders have openly voiced their opposition and reluctance to bring the bill forward in the near term.

Likewise, the White House has expressed several concerns claiming that postponing rate increases only hurts the NFIPs financial position and FEMA's ability to pay claims, and favors a phased-in approach to the rate increases.

Rubio, Warren Legislation to Protect Vets from Financial Scams

By: Miami-Dade OIA

Senators Marco Rubio (R-FL) and Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) introduced bipartisan legislation this week that would help protect older veterans from financial scams. The bill directs the Department of Veterans Affairs to work with other federal agencies and states to crack down on scam artists who are diverting federal funds intended to support low-income older veterans. The legislation was previously introduced by Senators Rubio and Warren as an amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act.

"Our veterans have courageously defended our country and protected our freedoms, and they deserve the utmost respect after their service," said Rubio. "That's why it is necessary to stop older veterans from being the target of scams and predatory practices. These heroes deserve better, and we will always appreciate their brave service and sacrifice."

"For thousands of our oldest veterans who need help with basic daily activities, the Aid and Attendance program is a critical lifeline," said Warren. "Unfortunately, scams are turning the program into something that can actually undermine the financial security of our older veterans and waste federal funds. This bipartisan proposal will help put an end to these financial scams and ensure that we honor our veterans' commitment, sacrifice, and service to the nation."

The VA offers an Aid & Attendance benefit (A&A) to help pay for assisted living or in-home personal care for veterans who qualify for a VA pension, and are housebound or require the aid and attendance of another person. Scam artists have targeted veterans, charging them fees for obtaining the benefit even though the application process is free. Even worse, they often take control of the veteran's assets and move them into an irrevocable trust or an annuity, which the elderly veteran often cannot access again for many years, creating significant financial strain. Moving assets this way may also disqualify the veteran for other assistance, like Medicaid.

Upcoming 2014 Legislative Session Dates

February 10, 2014	Interim Committee Week
February 17, 2014	Interim Committee Week
March 4, 2014	Legislative Session Convenes Bill Filing Deadline – 12:00 pm
March 5, 2014	Palm Beach County Day
May 2, 2014	Legislative Session Scheduled to Conclude