



# Palm Beach County State Legislative Update

## Department of Legislative Affairs

### Legislative Session Week 1

January 9-12, 2024

#### What a Ride! - Palm Beach County Days at the Capitol

Over three hundred of Palm Beach County's elected officials, local government administrators and staff, business leaders, non-profit managers, and community members traveled to Tallahassee to celebrate Palm Beach County Days at the Florida Capitol on January 9-10. All seven members of the Palm Beach County Board of County Commissioners, County Administrator Verdenia Baker, Deputy County Administrator Patrick Rutter, Assistant County Administrator Todd Bonlarron, and several Department Heads were present. Palm Beach County government was well represented, participating in over forty meetings with legislators and agency heads about a variety of issues important to PBC.



*PBC BCC Members, Administration, and PWE meet with FDOT.*

This year, transportation was the theme of Palm Beach County Days and a key focus of the County's 2024 Legislative Session priorities. Mayor Maria Sachs continued her advocacy in Tallahassee for roadway improvements that increase safety and alleviate traffic. Vice Mayor Maria Marino testified before the House Transportation and Modals Subcommittee about the importance of finding new mechanisms to fund road maintenance, as there has been a steady decline in fuel tax revenues with the proliferation of electric vehicles entering the market. Commissioner Sara Baxter advocated for Palm Beach County's request for state funding to reconstruct the first portion of County Road 880 with FDOT's District Four Secretary Steve Braun, and Commissioner Michael Barnett spoke with key lawmakers about funding for stormwater infrastructure improvements in Central Palm Beach County. Commissioner Marci Woodward emphasized the importance of moving people efficiently through PBC and its 39 municipalities.

Commissioner Mack Bernard supported state funding for several projects including the historic restoration of Peanut Island's facilities and Westgate CRA's Enhanced Lighting and Safety Initiative. Commissioner Gregg Weiss spoke to the Senate Committee on Agriculture to lend the County's support to SB 660, which would exempt from public record the personal information of people who adopt animals from local government animal shelters. These are just a few of the numerous Palm Beach County issues, programs, and projects that were discussed this past week at the Capitol.

Thank you to everyone who joined us in Tallahassee to advocate for our community!

## **2024 Legislative Session Begins**

On January 9, the Florida House and Senate convened in a joint session to kick off the sixty-day 2024 Legislative Session. Before the joint session, the Senate President and Speaker of the House each gave an address to their respective chambers identifying their legislative priorities and setting the tone for the next two months.

In her remarks, Florida Senate President Kathleen Passidomo (R-Naples) briefly highlighted the work the Senate did last year to increase access to affordable housing through the “Live Local Act”. She then identified two new priorities for her last year as Senate President, the “Live Healthy” and “Learn Local” initiatives. The Live Healthy Initiative seeks to grow our state’s health care workforce and ensure that our health care system is innovating to better serve Floridians. The Learn Local Initiative aims to cut red tape and remove cumbersome regulations applied to public schools while maintaining high academic standards and school safety. President Passidomo reiterated her commitment to Florida’s lands and natural resources, citing her support for legislation filed by Senator Hutson which would utilize revenues available through the Gaming Compact with the Seminole Tribe to establish dedicated funding for conservation lands. A transcript of the Senate President’s full speech can be found [HERE](#).

Florida House Speaker Paul Renner (R-Palm Coast) also touched on the work the House of Representatives did last session. He emphasized the House’s firm commitment to the protection of children and his top priority passed last year, which expanded access to school vouchers to all families regardless of income. Speaker Renner also lent his support for comprehensive changes to Florida’s health care system and to legislation utilizing new revenues from the Seminole Compact to support Florida’s environmental infrastructure. He went on to identify his priorities for the 2024 Legislative Session, which include banning social media use for persons under the age of 16 and restricting children’s access to pornography. Public safety was a central theme for the Speaker, who indicated the House would champion several bills cracking down on crime and empowering law enforcement. This legislation includes ending citizen review boards that investigate law enforcement officer misconduct complaints and increasing penalties for violence against these officers. A transcript of the House Speaker’s full speech can be found [HERE](#).

## **State of the State Address**

Governor Ron DeSantis (R) gave his inaugural “State of the State” address on Tuesday in which he shared this message: stay the course. The Governor told the chamber of state legislators that the state of the state was strong and they should continue to do the work they are doing because it’s been working. The expansion of school choice, protection of parental rights, increased school curriculum transparency, continued support for Israel, elimination of DEI in higher education, expansion of second amendment rights, and commitment to fiscal conservatism are among the long list of items Governor DeSantis pointed to as successes from last year’s legislative session. The Governor ended his remarks by encouraging lawmakers to continue to proclaim liberty, delivering good government that protects liberty and maintains order. A transcript of the Governor’s full address can be found [HERE](#).

## **On the Floor This Week**

Both the Senate and the House of Representatives considered legislation on the Floor of their respective chambers this week. Bills that are placed on the Special Order Calendar during the first week of session often indicate they are of great priority to the chamber’s presiding officer.

The Florida Senate passed four bills off the floor this week and sent them to the House for consideration.

- ***SB 276, Review of Advisory Bodies***: Requires executive agencies with advisory bodies to annually submit a report to the Governor’s Office with certain information. Requires any laws creating executive agency advisory bodies are subject to sunset unless saved from repeal by the Legislature. (Passed 39-0)

- ***CS/SB 7000, Deregulation of Public Schools/ Instructional, Administrative, & Support Personnel:*** Part of President Passidomo’s “Learn Local Initiative.” Provides school districts additional authority related to teacher certification and training, instructor contracts and salary schedules, personnel evaluations, and collective bargaining. (Passed 39-0)
- ***CS/SB 7002, Deregulation of Public Schools/School District Finance & Budgets, Facilities, and Administration & Oversight:*** Part of President Passidomo’s “Learn Local Initiative.” Removes unnecessary and burdensome regulations on school districts to advance efficient administrative processes, enhance facilities management, and simplify financial requirements. (Passed 39-0)
- ***CS/SB 7004, Deregulation of Public Schools/Assessment & Accountability, Instruction, and Education Choice:*** Part of President Passidomo’s “Learn Local Initiative.” Provides school districts additional authority related to prekindergarten programs, retention and graduation, assessments, school improvement, instructional materials, and reporting. (Passed 39-0)

The Florida House passed two concurrent resolutions off the floor this week. Concurrent resolutions are not subject to the Governor’s veto power and are not presented to the Governor for review.

- ***HCR 693, Congressional Term Limits:*** This concurrent resolution constitutes the state’s application to Congress under Article V of the United States Constitution to call a convention for the sole purpose of considering and proposing constitutional amendments limiting the number of terms a member of Congress may serve. The concurrent resolution does not specify the number of terms that members should be allowed to serve. (Passed 80-33)
- ***HCR 703, Balanced Federal Budget:*** This concurrent resolution constitutes the state’s application to Congress under Article V of the United States Constitution to call a convention for the sole purpose of considering and proposing constitutional amendments to the U.S. Constitution requiring a balanced federal budget in the absence of a national emergency. (Passed 80-33)

## **Bills of Interest In Committee**

### **House Ways & Means Committee**

**WMC 24-01, Increased Homestead Property Tax Exemption:** This committee bill is a joint resolution that proposes an amendment to the Florida Constitution to increase the current homestead exemption by \$25,000, exempting the assessed value between \$50,000 and up to \$100,000. If passed by the House and Senate, this measure would have to be approved by 60 percent of the voters during the 2024 General Election to take effect on January 1, 2025.

**WMC 24-02, Annual Inflation Adjustment to Homestead Exemption:** This committee bill is a joint resolution that proposes an amendment to the Florida Constitution requiring the \$25,000 of assessed value which is exempt from all ad valorem taxes (other than school district taxes) be adjusted annually for inflation. It would also apply to the increase in the existing \$25,000 assessed value amount which is exempt from all ad valorem taxes other than school district taxes in the constitutional amendment proposed by PCB WMC 24-01, if that amendment is approved by the voters. If passed by the House and Senate, this measure would have to be approved by 60 percent of the voters during the 2024 General Election to take effect on January 1, 2025.

**WMC 24-03, Homestead Exemption Implementation:** This proposed committee bill implements the amendments to the Florida Constitution proposed in WMC 24-01 and WMC 24-02 by making conforming statutory changes. This bill takes effect on July 1, 2024; however, the provisions of the bill are effective only upon passage of one or both amendments, and the effective date of the applicable provision is tied to the effective date of the amendments.

## **Senate Committee on Regulated Industries**

*SB 334, Rabies Vaccinations:* Authorizes employees or agents of an animal control authority to administer rabies vaccinations to impounded dogs, cats, and ferrets under the indirect supervision of a veterinarian. The veterinarian must be available for consultation in person or via telecommunication. The bill passed unanimously and has one more committee of reference.

## **Senate Committee on Community Affairs**

*SB 328, Affordable Housing:* Makes several changes to language that was included in last year's "Live Local Act" to address concerns brought forth by stakeholders after the implementation of the bill and to refine legislative intent. The bill removes the directive for local governments to approve qualifying developments in industrial areas, clarifies the requirements in the Act do not apply to airport-impacted areas, and clarifies that a local government's "currently allowed" density, height, and floor area ratio does not include any bonuses, variances, or other special exceptions provided in their regulations. In addition to several other statutory revisions, the bill appropriates another \$100 million for the Florida Hometown Heroes Program. Passed unanimously in its first committee of reference, the bill has one more stop before being eligible for consideration on the Senate Floor.

*SB 688, Alternative Mobility Funding Systems:* Authorizes local governments to adopt a mobility fee system or an alternative system in lieu of transportation concurrency. Stipulating that only the local government issuing the building permit can charge for transportation impacts within its jurisdiction, the bill requires the permitting local government to "collect and account" for any extra-jurisdictional impacts. Palm Beach County is strongly opposed to any legislation that would allow municipalities to cease the collection and remittance of the County's voter-approved impact fees, which are critical to offsetting the cost of capacity building on county thoroughfares necessitated by new development. The bill passed through the first committee and has two more committees of reference before the Floor. The bill's companion measure was also passed in its first committee this week.

*SB 712, Public Records/County & City Attorneys:* Exempting the personal identifying and location information of county and city attorneys (including deputy and assistant attorneys) from Florida's public records requirements, the bill seeks to protect these public employees from threats of violence and intimidation. The bill passed unanimously and has one more committee stop.

## **House Criminal Justice Subcommittee**

*HB 601, Complaints Against Law Enforcement and Correctional Officers:* Preempts to the state the receipt, processing, and investigation of complaints against law enforcement and correctional officers, as well as the rights and privileges afforded to such officers while under investigation. Local governments are expressly prohibited from passing or enforcing any ordinance, resolution, or rule relating to these topics. The bill passed in its first committee and has two more references before being eligible for the House Floor.

## **Senate Committee on Criminal Justice**

*SB 340, Intentional Damage to Critical Infrastructure:* Creates new felony offenses if a person is found having improperly tampered with critical infrastructure as defined in the bill. Critical infrastructure includes various utility infrastructures such as electrical power substations and facilities, water and wastewater treatment plants, as well as deepwater ports, airports, cyber assets, dams, and more. The bill has two more committee stops left before the Floor.

## **Senate Committee on Environment & Natural Resources**

*SB 650, Alternative Fuel Fleet Vehicle Rebates:* Expands the state rebate program for natural gas-powered fleet vehicles to also include rebates for hybrid and electric fleet vehicles. The bill has two more committee stops left.

*SB 738, Environmental Management:* Provides the prevailing party in a challenge filed against an authorization by the DEP or a water management district is entitled to recover reasonable costs and attorney fees. It also requires side slopes of nonindustrial stormwater management systems in or adjacent to residential or urban areas to be designed with a horizontal-to-vertical ratio no steeper than 4:1 to a depth of at least two feet below the control elevation and be stabilized with vegetation. The bill provides an exception if the slope incorporates erosion and sediment control best management practices and is sufficiently fenced to prevent accidental incursion into the system. In addition, the bill clarifies that causes of action under the Water Quality Assurance Act must be limited to damages to real or personal property directly resulting from pollution which was not authorized by any government approval or permit. The bill also requires DEP and each WMD to conduct a holistic review of their respective agency's current coastal permitting processes and other permit programs to identify areas of improvement and to increase efficiency within each process and program. The bill has two more committee stops before the Senate Floor.

### **House Transportation & Modals Subcommittee**

*CS/HB 107, Impact of Electric Vehicles & Plug-in Hybrid Electric Vehicles on State Revenues & Trust Funds:* As filed the bill would have established additional fees on electric and hybrid electric vehicles to counteract the steady decline in fuel tax revenues observed over the past several years. The bill was later amended to instead mandate the Office of Economic and Demographic Research to produce a report assessing the long-term effects of the proliferation of electric vehicles (EVs) on the State Transportation Trust Fund and sales and gross receipts tax revenues, as well as factors influencing EV adoption. The report, due by January 15, 2025, is intended to inform potential policy changes by the 2025 Legislature. The bill passed and has two more committees before being eligible for the House Floor.

*HB 287, Transportation:* Addressing several matters related to transportation and the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT), the bill contains a provision that stipulates FDOT may not annually commit more than 20 percent of the revenue derived from state fuel taxes and motor vehicle license-related fees deposited into the State Transportation Trust Fund (STTF) for public transit projects. This language is a result of concerns for the long-term health of the STTF as state fuel tax revenues continue to decline but will mean less state funding is available for public transit projects. The bill has two more committees of reference before the Floor.

### **House Constitutional Rights, Rule of Law & Government Operations Subcommittee**

*CS/HB 149, Continuing Contracts:* Revises the maximum estimated cost of construction projects for which governmental entity may enter into a continuing contract from \$4 million to \$7.5 million and provides for an annual percentage increase based on the Consumer Price Index beginning in 2026. The bill has two more committee stops.

*HB 151, Cost-of-living Adjustment of Retirement Benefits:* The bill establishes a 3 percent annual cost-of-living adjustment for all retired FRS Pension Plan members beginning July 1, 2024. The bill passed the committee and has two more references.

### **House Regulatory Reform Subcommittee**

*HB 1, Social Media Use for Minors:* Requires social media platforms to prohibit children under the age of 16 from creating an account and to perform reasonable age-verification methods to verify that the age of a person attempting to create an account is 16 years of age or older. The reasonable age-verification method must be conducted by an independent third-party not affiliated with the social media platform, and any information used to verify age must be deleted after it is verified. The bill does not apply to certain websites whose predominant function is e-mail, messaging, or texts; streaming services, news, sports, or entertainment sites; and online shopping or gaming. The bill passed its first of two committees and is on the agenda for next week's House Judiciary Committee meeting on 1/17.

**HB 3, Online Access to Materials Harmful to Minors:** The bill requires a commercial entity that intentionally publishes material harmful to minors on a website or application to take steps prohibiting access to such material by any person younger than 18. The bill requires such a commercial entity to perform reasonable age-verification methods to verify that the age of a person attempting to access the material is 18 or older. The bill passed its first of two committees and is on the agenda for next week's House Judiciary Committee meeting on 1/17.

**PCS for HB 433, Workplace Heat Exposure Requirements:** Prohibits local governments from preferring one contractor over another based on the wages or employment benefits provided by the contractor, prohibits local governments from requiring a minimum wage for certain contracted employees, and preempts the regulation of workplace heat exposure requirements to the state. The bill has two more committees of reference.

**HB 849, Veterinary Practices:** Establishes a framework for the practice of veterinary telehealth in Florida. The bill has one more committee stop before the House Floor.

### **House Civil Justice Subcommittee**

**HB 569, Suits Against the Government:** Increases the sovereign immunity caps for damages against state and local entities to \$400,000 per individual and \$600,000 per incident from the current \$200,000 and \$300,000 caps. The legislation also allows a local government to settle a claim over the cap without the passage of a claims bill, reduces the statute of limitations for filing a negligence claim to two years, and requires the Department of Financial Services to automatically adjust the statutory caps annually in accordance with the Consumer Price Index. The bill must still pass through two more committees before it is eligible to be heard on the House floor.

### **Bills of Interest Up Next Week**

***SB 850, Use of AI in Political Advertising:*** Senate Committee on Ethics & Elections, 1/16 at 8:30 AM

***SB 438, County Commissioner Term Limits:*** Senate Committee on Ethics & Elections, 1/16 at 8:30 AM

***SB 272, Appointment of Courtroom Animal Advocates:*** Senate Committee on Judiciary, 1/16 at 8:30 AM

***SB 1218, Broadband:*** Senate Committee on Regulated Industries, 1/16 at 8:30 AM

***SB 674, United States-produced Iron and Steel in Public Works Projects:*** Senate Committee on Governmental Oversight & Accountability, 1/16 at 11 AM

***HB 779, United States-produced Iron and Steel in Public Works Projects:*** House Constitutional Rights, Rule of Law, & Government Operations Subcommittee, 1/17 at 8 AM

***HB 901, Display of Flags by Government Entities:*** House Constitutional Rights, Rule of Law, & Government Operations Subcommittee, 1/17 at 8 AM

***HB 377, License or Permit to Operate a Vehicle for Hire:*** House Regulatory Reform & Economic Development Subcommittee, 1/17 at 8 AM

***HB 665, Expedited Approval of Residential Building Permits:*** House Regulatory Reform & Economic Development Subcommittee, 1/17 at 8 AM

***SB 266, Department of Transportation:*** Senate Committee on Transportation, 1/17 at 8:30 AM

***SB 648, License or Permit to Operate a Vehicle for Hire:*** Senate Committee on Transportation, 1/17 at 8:30 AM

***SB 774, Towing & Storage:*** Senate Committee on Transportation, 1/17 at 8:30 AM

***HB 479, Alternative Mobility Funding Systems:*** House Ways & Means Committee, 1/17 at 10:30 AM

***HB 7013, Special Districts:*** House Ways & Means Committee, 1/17 at 10:30 AM

***SB 280, Vacation Rentals:*** Senate Committee on Fiscal Policy, 1/18 at 1:30 PM

***CS/SB 328, Affordable Housing:*** Senate Committee on Fiscal Policy, 1/18 at 1:30 PM