



Be Bold:

On Tuesday, March 5, the Florida Legislature was called into session for 60 days. The session began with the annual State of the State address by Governor DeSantis. There was nothing new in his speech, as he reiterated proposals announced at press conferences over recent weeks. The governor called on the Legislature to be bold in their actions. "Be bold in championing economic opportunity. Be bold in protecting Florida's environment. Be bold in improving education. Be bold in defending the safety of our communities, Be bold because while perfection is not attainable, if we aim high we can achieve excellence," he said.

We would encourage the governor and Legislature to be bold as well. We would suggest they boldly: Invest in public education so that our teachers and education staff professionals can rise above 45th and 47th in the nation in pay, respectively; invest in the schools where 90 percent of our students learn; restore the three percent taken from the salaries of our teachers and education support professionals for their retirements; restore the professionalism in teaching careers and allow multi-year contracts; and demand that private schools receiving public dollars are held to the same accountability measures as neighborhood public schools.

Always about the Unions:

The Legislature is talking about unions again. The House [Oversight, Transparency & Public Management Subcommittee](#) considered and voted out [HB 13](#) on Tuesday. Sponsored by Rep. Jayer Williamson (R-Pace), HB 13 revolves around Florida workers who currently enjoy all rights protected under the State Constitution's collective bargaining provisions. DTU and FEA members, police, firefighters and state workers will all be affected by this bill, which would prohibit public sector collective bargaining agreements from including any provisions to allow union release time. Thus, local union presidents and other release-time members would be prohibited from receiving paid time for union activities during normal work hours.

The measure passed the committee by a 9-5 vote, but not without vigorous opposition from some members. Rep. Javier Fernandez (D-Coral Gables) offered an amendment to retain member employees' rights to continue union activities without interference. The amendment failed.

We thank Rep. Anna Eskamani (D-Orlando) and especially Rep. Rene Plasencia (R- Titusville), who spoke passionately in opposition to the bill. Rep. Eskamani recapped just a few of the rights we enjoy because of unions. Rep. Plasencia shared that he was the lone member of the teachers' union who served as his school site union representative. He also reminded the committee that he has watched his party attack teachers and

personal friends who are firefighters over the past several legislative sessions. He said that this time around he would do more than vote no, and told the committee why he strongly opposed the measure.

[The Education Train is Here:](#)

We've had 7069, 7055 (old school throwback 736) and now 7070. The Senate [Education Committee](#) filed [SPB 7070](#), the omnibus "education" package for the 2019 session, and the proposed bill was heard on Wednesday. SPB 7070, as we outlined in last week's Frontline, includes some provisions that DTU and FEA have championed for years, such as providing dedicated funding for community schools and wrap-around services and addressing issues with teacher certification. It also mandates, however, some not so friendly public education actions such as creating a brand-new voucher using taxpayer funds to send kids to private and religious schools, and continuing but amending the Best and Brightest bonus program at the expense of meaningful salary increases for all teachers and education staff professionals.

We especially want to thank Andrea Cochran and Chris Weinrich, high school teachers from Volusia, and Shayla Lunsford, a first-grade teacher from Leon, for providing powerful testimony to the Senate Education Committee against SPB 7070 and why teachers need and deserve raises rather than bonuses for some. Many other teachers came to the committee meeting and waived in opposition to the bill as well.

The committee voted 5-3 to introduce SPB 7070, with Sens. Lori Berman (D-Boynton Beach), Janet Cruz (D-Tampa) and Bill Montford (D-Tallahassee) debating against and ultimately voting in opposition to the bill. We also thank Sen. David Simmons (R-Longwood). While voting in favor of the bill, he addressed other ways we can fund the wait list for the Florida Tax Credit voucher rather than opening up the FEFP (and using taxpayer funds) for a new voucher. Sen. Simmons also spoke about why he supports (and ultimately championed for inclusion in the bill) expanding community schools and providing wrap-around services — such as health care, before and after school programs, and counseling services for students and families in need — for our neighborhood public schools. As we all know, children can't learn when their bellies are growling; when they have a toothache from lack of dental care; when they can't see the chalkboard because they don't have vision care; when they are worried about violence at home; or when a parent is suffering from substance abuse.

Sens. Berman and Cruz filed, and ultimately withdrew, amendments at FEA's request. This was due in part to conversations with Senate leadership about FEA's priority of seeing meaningful salary increases for our educators. We now wait to see where [SB 7070](#) will be referred to next. As a committee bill, it had to be passed by the committee before it could be filed and referred by the president to other committees. The fight will continue regarding using bonuses as salary increases and increasing funding for local school districts so that real salary increases can happen.

[House Quality Sub Committee:](#)

On Thursday the [House PreK-12 Quality Subcommittee](#) heard [PKQ2](#), a proposed committee bill that addresses teacher preparation and retention. The PCB extends the time non-certified educators have to pass the General Knowledge test from 1 to 3 years; reduces the escalating fees for those who retake the General Knowledge exam; creates a 2-year district mentoring program for newly hired teachers; standardizes professional

development content; and codifies into law allowing charter schools to access district teacher prep. The proposed committee bill passed and will now be introduced as a bill. We'll wait to see where it is referred to next.

Also up in committee was [HB 195](#), by Rep. Kimberly Daniels (D-Jacksonville). This bill would mandate that school districts offer high school students an elective course to study the Bible, including the Old and New Testaments. There was a lengthy discussion and debate about whether this is constitutional and appropriate, or whether the sponsor would consider amending the bill to include the study of other historical texts such as the Quran. The amendment was denied. HB 195 passed by an 11-3 vote. HB 195 has no Senate companion.

A second bill by Rep. Daniels was scheduled to be heard in committee. [HB 913](#) would require school boards entering collective bargaining to post on their website the list of items that the parties are negotiating at least 10 days before the first bargaining meeting. Our PPA staff met with the sponsor to address concerns with the bill and to attempt to understand what issue the representative is trying to solve. After a lengthy discussion, Rep. Daniels chose to temporarily postpone (TP) the bill. The bill also does not have a Senate companion. While it was TP'd in committee, this doesn't prohibit it from being heard at a future date, so we'll be keeping our eye on this issue.

[Who's coming to Tallahassee?](#)

This session, we will again be working closely with the AFL-CIO Working Families Lobby Corps to lobby legislators in Tallahassee on pro-public education issues and against anti-union legislation. If you haven't already, be sure to let us know via the [AFL-CIO Working Families Lobby Corps](#) when to expect you, and book your hotels ASAP.

If you have any questions about coming to Tallahassee, please don't hesitate to contact Tina Dunbar at Tina.Dunbar@floridaea.org. Remember that your visit to Tallahassee should include proper capitol attire — suits, slacks, button-up shirts and/or ties for the men; dresses or slacks and blouses for the women; and especially comfortable dress shoes for everyone. We also recommend you bring a light jacket or sweater, and an umbrella. Tallahassee weather is notoriously unpredictable for spring, not to mention committee room temperatures!

**[Questions? Call PPA at
850-224-2078](#)**