



2019 Legislative Session Update

Week 7 – Day 46

April 19, 2019

Shortened Week, No Shortage of Work:

Week seven was a shortened workweek for the Legislature due to the Passover and Easter holidays. It was not a shortened week, however, in terms of workload. The Senate took up the school safety and education packages, while the House took up several bills including the tax package and bills dealing with higher education and parental notice.

What isn't being addressed right now is the issue of fair pay for our educators and overall significant funding increases for our neighborhood public schools. Help us keep the Senate and House focused on more funding and [sign our petition here](#). Once you've signed, help spread the word via your social media pages by sharing the link and encouraging others to sign as well!

School Safety

On Wednesday the Senate had [SB 7030](#) on the special order calendar. This is legislation to implement many of the recommendations from the Marjory Stoneman Douglas Commission, including one very controversial provision to allow classroom teachers to participate in the Guardian program and carry a weapon in their classroom. Senator Manny Diaz (R-Hialeah Gardens) filed a strike-all amendment that offered several changes to the bill, and Senate Democrats filed many amendments to try to improve the legislation.

As he did in Senate Appropriations last week, public education champion Senator Perry Thurston (D-Fort Lauderdale) again filed an amendment to restore the prohibition on classroom teachers being allowed to volunteer for the Guardian program. This provision is consistent with current state law. Despite a lengthy debate for and against, the amendment ultimately failed on a party-line vote 16-22. Senators Kevin Rader (D-Boca Raton) and Anitere Flores (R-Miami) were not on the floor to cast their vote. (Senator Flores voted against SB 7030 in Appropriations due to the arming of classroom teachers.) The bill is ready to be heard by the full Senate. We expect that vote will occur on Tuesday, April 23. We expect the House to take up their school safety package, HB 7093, on the House floor, which had been temporarily postponed (TP'd) several weeks ago.

If you didn't get a chance to watch the debate for and against the Thurston amendment, let me summarize. Senators who fight consistently against school board local control and who do everything they can to set state policy for educators, are suddenly all for school districts having local control with regards to guns. So let's recap: School boards have no local control over how they evaluate their educators, what curriculum teachers teach, whether they can provide their teachers and education staff professionals a continuing contract or provide additional pay increases based on educators having a higher degree, and a whole HOST of other items. Senators, however, will advocate for local control when it involves guns in our children's classrooms.

Taxes

On Tuesday the House Appropriations Committee took up [HB 7123](#). As you will recall, in addition to setting the three-day “back to school” and seven-day “disaster preparedness” sales tax holidays, and rolling back the commercial rent tax rate, the bill also includes the requirement that school boards share local voter-approved tax levies with charter schools. As amended in committee, the bill will now require any school district that passes a voter-approved millage tax referendum to share proportionally the taxes collected with charter schools — even if the referendum expressly stated that the levy WOULD NOT be used for charter schools. To put that into perspective, because this provision would be retroactive — and not prospective — at least 16 counties that have passed a referendum levying a higher millage would be impacted. Those counties that are currently considering a future millage referendum would also be impacted.

The Florida Education Association and a hired lobbyist for the Palm Beach County School District were the only people to testify against this provision in the bill before the committee. PPA staff worked closely with the school district lobbyists and committee members ahead of time to educate the legislators on this provision. We thank Representatives, Joseph Geller, Barbara Watson and Carlos Smith, who debated against the bill, and Representatives Evan Jenne and Ben Diamond, who raised serious questions with the constitutionality of this requirement. Ultimately the bill passed by a party-line 18-9 vote.

The Senate currently does not have a companion measure to the bill, but we’ll be waiting to see if one comes and will continue to work on this to keep it out of the Senate’s bills.

Education Package

On Thursday, the Senate Appropriations Committee held another marathon all-day meeting to address nearly 60 bills, one of which was the big education package — SB 7070. Late Wednesday evening, ahead of a 9 a.m. committee meeting, an 85-page strike-all amendment was filed by the bill’s sponsor, Senator Diaz. The amendment was to make changes to the bill to bring it more in line with the House’s positions. The Senate — where members argued to have transparency in their bill process compared to the take-it-or-leave-it process created by the House in the past two years in HB 7069 and HB 7055 — introduced a last-minute strike-all.

At least senators had an opportunity to file amendments to the package, unlike the conforming bills of the past two years. Senators David Simmons (R-Longwood) and Tom Lee (R-Brandon) both filed amendments, with Sen. Lee putting forward eight amendments that took the Senate to task and focused on making much-needed improvements to public schools and holding charter schools accountable. Some were adopted, while others were withdrawn to file again later.

Included in the strike-all were changes to the newly created Family Empowerment voucher. These changes would increase the number of available vouchers for public school students to attend private schools on taxpayers’ dime, and increase the student eligibility level to 300 percent of the federal poverty level. That’s now \$77,250 for a family of four. It equates to more than \$130 million taken from general revenue funds for the first year of the voucher.

The bill still maintains the Senate’s proposed Best & Brightest bonuses, **which would result in fewer teachers being qualified for bonuses than under the current program.** While the Senate eliminates the ACT/SAT component of one bonus, they replace it with bonuses for recruitment, retention and recognition that will do nothing to help school boards recruit and retain educators or recognize our hard-working educators. Even the House has a better B&B proposal!

Instead of awarding bonuses based on unequal allocation, why not put the bonus allocation into a dedicated salary allocation or directly into the base student allocation for much-needed salary increases? We heard over and over again on the Senate floor that school districts need flexibility

for deciding how to implement school security measures, so why aren't we giving them the same flexibility when it comes to recruiting, and above all else, compensating our educators?

After a lengthy discussion and debate, the bill passed by a party-line vote. The bill now heads to the floor for a final vote, likely next week.

Final Weeks in Tallahassee...

Shout out to the educators from Hillsborough, Orange, Osceola, Pasco and Pinellas who came to Tallahassee this week to meet with legislators regarding education issues.

Only two weeks of session left! If you plan to come to Tallahassee and haven't let us know you are coming already, fill out the [AFL-CIO Working Families Lobby Corps form](#) to let us know when to expect you. 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 ladies; 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