



## 2019 Legislative Update

Week 6, Day 39

April 12, 2019

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### *Rolling Along in Week 6:*

The calendar of committee meetings has lessened as we near the end of the legislative session. The issues, however keep piling up as we fight against bills that would hurt our students, our educators and our schools. This week time was spent in budget committees, tax committees, and running the halls of the House and Senate.

### *Final Stop for School Safety Bill:*

On Wednesday the Senate [Appropriations Committee](#) took up [SB 7030](#) – 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. This was the final stop for SB 7030 before the bill is ready for a final vote on the Senate floor.

Sen. Perry Thurston (D-Fort Lauderdale) filed an amendment to SB 7030 to restore the prohibition on allowing classroom teachers to volunteer for the Guardian program. This provision is consistent with current state law, passed as part of SB 7026 last session, which was the “compromise” position of the Senate last year when some senators wanted to arm all school personnel and others were opposed to adding more weapons on campus.

We thank Sen. Thurston for his strong and unwavering commitment to ensuring that classroom teachers are not armed. We also thank Kyle Savage, a fifth-grade teacher and former army military police officer from Cape Canaveral, and veteran Palm Beach County classroom teachers Ellen Baker and Barbara Alper, who all testified as to why arming classroom teachers is the wrong direction for Florida. Ultimately the amendment was withdrawn to allow for the majority and minority parties to work on this provision in the bill. After lengthy debate by many members, SB 7030 passed the Senate Appropriations Committee by an 11-9 vote. Sen. Anitere Flores (R-Miami) joined the Democrats in opposition to the bill.

You may recall that the Florida Education Association’s official position is that we are opposed to the expansion of the Guardian program but remain neutral on the remaining provisions of the bill. **Please call YOUR [senator](#) and YOUR [representative](#) before Wednesday night and urge them to vote in opposition to any bill that allows the arming of classroom teachers.** Click on the [House](#) and [Senate](#) links to find Tallahassee numbers for your legislators. HB 7093 and SB 7030 could be heard on the House and Senate chamber floors as early as Wednesday, April 17.

### *Keep an Eye on the House:*

This week the House [Ways & Means Committee](#) dropped a PCB on Tuesday night, and on Thursday debated and ultimately passed WMC 2 (now filed as [HB 7123](#)). Provisions within the PCB regarding the sharing of locally approved tax levies with charters schools is problematic for the numerous counties who passed — and who will pass — local referendums to increase their public education spending. While the bill gives a local county discretion to share their millage with charter schools, it would ultimately punish a school board that chooses not to share referendum funds by taking away other funds they hold back from a charter school.

PPA staff worked closely with school board lobbyists and committee members to offer amendments (all failed) and to urge legislators to oppose the bill. The PCB passed by a vote of 14-2. The Senate currently does not have a companion measure to the bill, but we'll be waiting to see if one comes.

### **Other Bills We're Watching:**

Your Public Policy Advocacy (PPA) staff were monitoring and working on 59 bills on various agendas this week while giving constant attention to our No. 1 priority: increasing public education funding and ultimately funding for our educators. Many bills that were problematic are dying as subcommittees in the House are no longer meeting. That doesn't mean the issues are dying, however, as legislators start trying to find similar bills moving through the process to tack their bill ideas onto in the form of amendments. And that REALLY keeps us on their toes as amendment deadlines are shrinking, and amendments can pop literally as committee starts.

Here are some of the bills that are still alive and moving:

#### **School Funding:**

Appropriations bills ([HB 5001](#) and [SB 2500](#)) and companion implementing bills passed both chambers last week, but they don't match in dollar amount or projects funded. The Conference committee is where all of that will be negotiated, unfortunately mostly behind closed doors and with little public input. That's where our champion legislators come in. Please continue to contact YOUR senator and YOUR representative and urge them to invest in our students' future.

#### **Hurricane Recovery:**

SB 520 and SB 1610 would provide funds for schools districts that were affected by Hurricanes Michael and Irma. One provision would hold the affected school districts harmless from school accountability provisions if their school grades drop, and loosen third-grade retention and 12th-grade graduation requirements. The Senate has been supportive of these efforts, but few of the bills in the House have been heard.

#### **Voluntary Pre-K (VPK):**

SB 1594 by Sen. Gayle Harrell and HB 1193 by Reps. Vance Aloupis and Erin Grall would change student and program assessment of VPK from the kindergarten readiness rate given at the beginning of kindergarten to assessments and screening given during the VPK school year. Both bills have two committee stops remaining.

#### **Collective Bargaining/Union Certification:**

You may recall from previous Updates that two bills regarding collective bargaining and union decertification were filed — HB 13 to eliminate release time for union members for union-related business, and SB 698 to restore the union certification process to 2017 by eliminating the 50-percent membership threshold. So here's the good news and bad news: While neither of these bills seems to be moving, there are still three weeks to go in the session and anything can happen in the final days of session.

#### **Curriculum and Instruction Policy:**

SB 226 and HB 401 regarding mastery-based education advanced to the floor of the House this week, while the Senate version has a last stop in Appropriations before it is ready for the floor. These companion bills would create an expansion of a pilot that began two years ago to allow school districts to plan and experiment with course credit not based on required seat time. It would also allow for alternative grading scales. There was no evidence of increased student achievement success presented from the pilot.

SB 982 by Sen. Thurston and HB 259 by Rep. Patricia Williams regarding human trafficking education in schools: Both bills would revise the required health education in public schools to include information on human trafficking in an effort to prevent the problem and help students recognize the signs. Both bills

suddenly started moving through committees. The House version is ready for the floor, while the Senate bill has one last stop: Appropriations.

### **Vouchers and Charter School Expansion:**

As we've been reporting, there are a whole host of bills dealing with voucher and charter school expansion moving this session. Bills would open up many more school districts to Schools of Hope charter schools, allow colleges and universities to authorize charter schools, and add another voucher entitlement program (to the six existing voucher programs) but would be funded through public education funds that go directly to school districts for our neighborhood public schools. These include SB 934 by Sen. Manny Diaz regarding high performing charter schools; HB 7095 by Rep. Aloupis regarding school choice; and HB 7075 by Rep. Jennifer Sullivan regarding vouchers. Unmentioned previously were HB 1171 by Rep. Grall and SB 1726 by Sen. Joe Gruters regarding parental rights, legislation that would require parental notification and parental consent on many issues including a child's education.

### **Higher education:**

HB 839 by Rep. Ray Rodrigues and SB 1296 by Sen. Diaz would alter performance funding for colleges and universities; change the way the higher education governance structures operate; tighten capital funding restrictions; address articulation agreements and require an annual "Academic Freedom Survey" be given to all students and staff.

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### **Marjory Stoneman Douglas Commission:**

While all the conversations and school safety debate swirled around the Capitol, the Marjory Stoneman Douglas Commission met again this week to review district implementation of last year's School Safety Act (SB 7026). Department of Education Safe Schools Director Damien Kelly presented findings from the state's initial district review. You can see what districts around the state are doing to increase school safety, including identifying "hard corners," holding active shooter drills, school Guardian implementation and more. Of note is the list of current and proposed school Guardian programs, found on page 13 of the department's Safe School Update PowerPoint.

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### **Final Weeks in Tallahassee ...**

We're having so much fun in Tallahassee, don't you want to join us? Big thanks to representatives from Brevard, Hillsborough, Miami-Dade, Orange and Palm Beach counties who came to Tallahassee this week to meet with legislators regarding education issues, several of whom testified in committee.

If you plan to come to Tallahassee and haven't let us know you are coming, fill out the AFL-CIO Working Families Lobby Corps form to let us know when to expect you. Be sure to 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](mailto: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.***