



2020 Legislative Committees Update

1st Committee Week

Sept. 20, 2019

It's only just begun ...

Welcome back to Tallahassee, where there's construction on the streets, heat and humidity in the air, and fundraisers all around. Are you ready for another session? We certainly are!

DTU will continue to provide you updates on the Legislative Session once the actual session begins in January.

Safety, security and guns ...

The Senate Education Committee wasted no time kicking off the first committee meeting of the session talking school safety and security. On Monday, the committee met to get a briefing on the Guardian Program – the program authorized by the Legislature to train volunteers to be armed and protect the school in instances of a shooting. Damien Kelly, director of the Office of Safe Schools, told the committee that 38 school districts are participating in the Guardian Program. Only 36 sheriffs are approved to provide training, with three counties offering training to other counties.

Senators. Lori Berman (D-Palm Beach), Janet Cruz (D-Tampa) and Bill Montford (D-Tallahassee) asked Kelly a rapid series of questions regarding who and where the guardians are. Kelly reported that 11 counties are open to training teachers to carry a firearm. (The FEA counts seven counties that have indicated they will do so: Bay, Gilchrist, Lafayette, Levy, Okeechobee, Putnam and Suwanee.) When asked specifically where those teachers are and how many there are, Kelly stated he could not report how many teachers are participating because “that’s not the information we are asking for.” Kelly said that, among 3,717 participating public and charter schools statewide, there are 3,170 law enforcement officers at those schools and 1,084 guardians trained for those schools.

Kelly was also asked about the lawsuit between the Palm Beach County School Board (PBCSB) and Invictus Inc., the company hired by PBCSB to train guardians. The company is alleged to have provided training that is inadequate under state law; the School Board is suing

to recoup training costs. Senate President Bill Galvano has previously stated that “tweaks” to the guardian law will be forthcoming in the 2020 session as a result of the lawsuit. We’ll be monitoring for tweaks and, of course, reporting back to you.

The committee also addressed mental health. Public Schools Chancellor Jacob Oliva presented a recap of mental health funding allocated in the 2018 session (\$69.2 million) and the 2019 session (\$75 million). Oliva shared that the State Board of Education is re-requesting \$100 million for the 2020-2021 budget. As of Aug. 1, when all “mental health assistance allocation plans” were due, all 67 school districts and four universities had submitted plans. To find your county’s plan, click [here](#).

The Senate Committee on Infrastructure & Security also met Monday to talk more globally about preventing mass shootings — whether in schools or in movie theaters, night clubs, bars, concerts, banks or other locations. The committee, chaired by Sen. Tom Lee (R-Brandon), was tasked to take on the topic by the Senate president as a result of the repeated occurrence of mass-shooting tragedies nationwide.

Money, money, money ... money!

The House and Senate Appropriations committees heard presentations regarding the long-range fiscal outlook by Amy Baker, the state’s coordinator for the Office of Demographics and Research. Baker indicated that her office projects a drop in state tax collections of \$451.6 million for the current fiscal year, FY 2019-2020, budget and \$416.1 million for the FY 2020-2021 budget — for a two-year reduction of \$867.7 million.

This drop in tax revenue is in part due to a loss in corporate income tax of \$543 million (remember the hundreds of millions we’ve “given back” to businesses over the years in the form of tax breaks?) and blackjack revenue share from the Seminole Tribe. As you may be aware, Seminole representatives say that the Tribe has stopped paying the state its cut of blackjack money because state gambling officials failed to “aggressively enforce” the Tribe’s exclusive rights to offer the popular card game in Florida. We don’t know whether this is the year the House and Senate can finally agree on a Gaming Compact to recapture that loss in revenue before session’s end.

Compared to the state’s overall \$91 billion budget, that’s a drop in the bucket, but it does mean someone isn’t getting paid out of the pot this year. We’ll have to watch and see how this plays out this year.

House leadership anoints its future leader

The House Republican caucus met Tuesday for a ceremonial election of Rep. Chris Sprowls (R-Palm Harbor), who was officially selected as the speaker-designate for the 2021-2022 session. Reps. Jay Trumbell (R-Panama City) and Chris Latvala (R-Clearwater) made the first and second nomination speeches and shared stories of their friend. Surrounded by current and former Republican leaders from the Senate, the Governor's mansion, and leaders of state agencies and the judiciary, Sprowls took his place at the podium for a speech outlining his leadership style and policy agenda for the session he will lead beginning in 2021.

Senator Wilton Simpson (R-Spring Hill) will be officially selected as Senate president-designate in the first October committee week.

VPK

The House Education Committee's first meeting ahead of the 2020 Legislative session focused solely on pre-K and early learning, a response to criticism from Governor Ron DeSantis, who in May said kindergarten readiness rates across the state are indefensible and "certainly not good enough."

While legislators suggested possible fixes to pre-K performance, such as changing when students are tested, a panel of educators testified that funding is a daunting barrier that early education providers are struggling to overcome. Voluntary prekindergarten (VPK) providers are judged by how their young graduates do on "readiness" tests taken within the first 30 days of starting kindergarten. About 42 percent of students who participated in VPK in 2017-18 weren't ready for kindergarten, according to state data released in May.

Representatives Vance Aloupis (R-Miami) and Jennifer Sullivan (R-Mount Dora), committee chairwoman, suggested testing students while they're enrolled in VPK, a move that was in legislation last session that never reached the floor. Shan Goff, executive director of the Office of Early Learning, said that's not on the state's radar for this year.