



# HOUSE MAJORITY OFFICE

FLORIDA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES



REPRESENTATIVE RAY RODRIGUES, MAJORITY LEADER

The Majority Office created the below articles as content for your newsletters. The Majority Office also created the following video that highlights the “Top 5” things that happened in the House throughout the week: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1WsSYOR\\_CRs&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1WsSYOR_CRs&feature=youtu.be)

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## Florida Closes 2016 with Strong Job Growth

Recent job reports show that 2016 was another strong year for economic growth in Florida. 237,300 new private-sector jobs were created and Florida finished the year with a 3.3% job growth rate in December, which is more than double the national rate. This continued the trend of job growth with over 1.25 million private-sector jobs created over the last six years.

I look forward to working with my colleagues this session to continue supporting the policies I believe have made Florida a great state for job creation—cutting red tape, investing in student success, and lowering taxes for businesses and families.

## House Subcommittee Votes to Repeal Red Light Cameras

On Wednesday, the House Transportation & Infrastructure subcommittee passed House Bill 6007 to remove the authorization for the Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles and local governments to install and maintain traffic infraction detectors, or “red light cameras.” The subcommittee’s decision follows its previous review of the 2015-2016 Red Light Camera Summary Report, which shows an *increase* in total crashes and injuries at intersections with red light cameras.

The subcommittee vote was also supported by public testimony in the meeting, including testimony that I found particularly powerful by a retired traffic homicide investigator who asserted that *no* device can prevent the root cause of accidents: inattentive drivers and impaired drivers.

In my opinion, HB 6007 is great news for Floridians, and I hope it becomes law. Although red light cameras may have good intentions, the data shows they simply do not work. I will keep you updated as the bill moves through the committee process. If it becomes law, the bill would not be effective until July 1, 2020.

## House Committee Votes to Extend Post-Service Lobbying Bans

The House Public Integrity and Ethics committee passed a bill on Tuesday that would extend the current ban on post-service lobbying from two years to six years. The ban prevents legislators, statewide elected officers, and appointed state officers from lobbying the executive branch and personally representing a person or entity for compensation before their former government body.



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The committee also passed a joint resolution, which would propose an amendment to Florida's Constitution that would apply the same extension of the post-service lobbying ban from two to six years. If the resolution passes both houses of the Legislature by a three-fifths vote, then the proposed constitutional amendment would appear on the 2017 ballot, where it would require 60% voter approval for passage.

In my view, extending the timeframe of the lobbying ban will help eliminate any actual and perceived revolving door of elected officials profiting off their time in public office. The committee's actions correctly recognize that holding public office is a sacred trust, and I look forward to strongly supporting both measures.

## **Judge Resigns Ahead of House Committee Meeting**

Jacksonville circuit Judge Mark Hulse III abruptly resigned a day before the Public Integrity and Ethics committee was set to explore impeachment proceedings. Had Judge Hulse not resigned, committee staff was prepared to provide the committee a detailed report on the judge's misconduct and a recommendation that the committee consider articles of impeachment at its earliest convenience.

Committee staff instead gave a brief summary of the Judge's actions, which included numerous examples of misconduct, such as: routinely being unprepared for court; improper communications with a prosecutor; directing judicial assistants to work on his reelection campaign on state time; failing to fully disclose finances; and making numerous inappropriate and offensive statements about African Americans and women.

I believe it is our duty to exercise the authority vested in the House by the Florida Constitution to pursue the impeachment of officers who violate the public trust and I applaud the committee's work on this matter. I believe our liberties are best protected by vigilant application of the checks and balances provided in our constitution.

## **House Subcommittee Examines Professional and Business Regulations**

This week, the Careers & Competition subcommittee hosted a panel to discuss concerns regarding regulations burdening Florida's business communities. Panel members included the Vice President from the Tallahassee Chamber of Commerce, an Attorney for the Institute of Justice, Vice President & General Counsel of the Florida Retail Federation, and others.

During the discussion, panel members discussed options to reduce these burdens. Suggestions included requiring insurance rather than licensing, utilizing certifications in place of licensing requirements, and eliminating the local business tax.

This discussion emphasized the need to reduce regulatory burdens on businesses and I look forward to working with my colleagues to explore ways to do so. I'm confident we can strike the important balance of helping businesses while continuing to maintain the health, safety and welfare of consumers.



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## **Workers' Compensation Receives In-Depth Discussion in the Florida House**

Recently, two Florida Supreme Court decisions held that two of the state's workers' compensation laws are unconstitutional. One case struck down a law that limited temporary disability payments to injured workers to two years and another struck down a law that limited attorney's fees in workers' compensation cases. As a result of the Court's holdings, state regulators approved a 14.5 percent increase to workers' compensation insurance rates: a significant increase that I believe will send ripples throughout the business community and state economy.

On Wednesday, the Insurance & Banking subcommittee began part one of a two-part examination of Florida's workers' compensation system. With informative dialogue between panelists and representatives, the subcommittee shed light on issues ranging from attorney involvement and fees to improving injured worker satisfaction with medical care.

I look forward to paying close attention to the next meeting. In light of the recent increase in rates, I believe it is essential to reform our workers' compensation system to provide relief to both business owners and workers throughout the state.

## **House Subcommittee Leads Discussion on Private Property Rights**

This week, the House Agriculture and Property Rights subcommittee led a panel discussion on private property rights in Florida. The discussion included an overview of property laws in Florida as well as a discussion among members about methods to protect property rights. I believe protecting private property rights is vital and discussions like the one held in the subcommittee will ensure we continue to do so.

## **PreK-12 Innovation Subcommittee Examines Public Education Options**

The PreK-12 Innovation subcommittee met on Wednesday to discuss public school choice options in Florida, which include controlled open enrollment, public charter schools, magnet schools, and career academies. The subcommittee heard from school district employees from Lee and Polk counties, the Florida Consortium of Public Charter Schools, and the Florida Alliance of Charter Schools.

The speakers from Lee and Polk counties provided encouraging testimony on how school districts are acknowledging the importance of school choice. The presenters from the charter school organizations also provided persuasive testimony on the positive impact of charter schools in our state.

I will make sure to keep you informed of all developments on this important issue. I look forward to supporting any and all measures that promote more educational options for our children.



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## **National School Choice Week**

This week was National School Choice Week, which aims to raise public awareness on all the different types of education options for children. The options include traditional public schools, charter schools, magnet schools, virtual education, private schools, scholarship programs, and homeschooling.

In my view, there is no question that Florida is leading the way in school choice: currently, there are 287,568 Florida students enrolled in Choice and Magnet programs at 1,660 district schools. Moreover, Florida will host over 2,000 school choice events, the most of any state.

I believe National School Choice Week serves as an important reminder that we must continue fighting for educational freedom so that all children have the best opportunity at success.

## **Post-Secondary Education Subcommittee Discusses Postsecondary Civics Education**

The Post-Secondary Education subcommittee met this week to discuss postsecondary civics education. The subcommittee heard testimony from a policy analyst for the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability (OPPAGA), a Dean from St. Petersburg College on the Florida College System Civics Literacy Initiative, the Vice Provost for Academic Affairs for Miami Dade College, and the Communications Director for the University of Florida's Bob Graham Center for Public Service.

The presenters demonstrated that while certain colleges and universities offer adequate civics education, the courses are not required and the amount of students who take advantage of some form of civics education is far too small. In fact, according to OPPAGA, only 21% of students at Florida colleges and universities took at least one civics-related course in the 2014-2015 school year.

I believe civics education is imperative to a high-functioning democratic society, and I look forward to further exploring ways to promote civics education in our colleges and universities. As OPPAGA noted, requiring the completion of one or more currently offered civics-related courses, completion of a newly created course on civics, or completion of a knowledge based civics assessment are all potential options.

## **Civil Justice and Claims Subcommittee Focuses on Timely Justice**

On Thursday, the Civil Justice and Claims subcommittee met for the second time ahead of the 2017 Legislative Session and again devoted significant attention to the very important issue of timely justice. During its last meeting legislative staff briefed the subcommittee on the issue. This week, the subcommittee heard directly from the State Court System, who sent representatives from the trial courts, district courts, and the Supreme Court.

Although there are numerous variables that affect court timeliness and there are different ways to measure court timeliness, I believe that both meetings established a clear need for the court system to improve. For example, as we learned in the subcommittee's first meeting, *tens of thousands* of cases pending in the state court system currently exceed time standards set by the Florida Supreme Court.



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I'm grateful for the presenters from the State Court System that provided their ideas on how the Legislature can assist the courts' with increasing their efficiency. Going forward, I will keep you informed as the House considers any available options to address this important issue.

## **Health Quality Subcommittee Continues Focus on Medical Marijuana**

On Tuesday, November 8, 2016, Florida voters passed an amendment to the Florida Constitution— Amendment 2—to legalize the use of marijuana for certain debilitating medical conditions. The amendment went into effect on January 3, 2017, and requires the Florida Department of Health (DOH) to adopt regulations related to patient and caregiver identification cards, caregiver qualifications, medical marijuana treatment centers (MMTCs) and patient supply limits by July 3, 2017. DOH must begin registering MMTCs and issuing identification cards by October 3, 2017. Any Florida citizen has a private cause of action to compel DOH rule-making, MMTC registration or issuance of identification cards, if DOH fails to meet either of these deadlines.

DOH recently released its proposed rule on the implementation of Amendment 2 this month, and will be holding several public forums to take input on the proposed rules during the month of February, with meetings in Jacksonville, Fort Lauderdale, Tampa, Orlando and Tallahassee.

This week, the Health Quality subcommittee continued its focus on medical marijuana in Florida, this time discussing regulatory options and the economic and law enforcement implications. The subcommittee heard presentations from the former Director of Marijuana Coordination in Colorado Florida Police Chiefs Association, Florida Sheriffs Association, and the Department of Highway Safety & Motor Vehicles, among others.

I look forward to working with Members from both sides of the aisle to reach a consensus on medical marijuana's role in our community. As your state representative, I will always do my best to make sure that your safety and health come first.

## **Health & Human Services Committee Receives Update on Transparency**

Last year, the Legislature passed and the Governor signed into law, House Bill 1175, relating to transparency in health care. Notably, the law requires hospitals, physicians and insurers to give consumer cost estimates prior to providing services; requires hospitals to issue bills that are easier for patients to understand; and requires the Administration for Health Care Administration (AHCA) to contract with a vendor to create an interactive website for consumers to research the cost of hospital services.

This week, the Health & Human Services committee received a briefing from AHCA's Deputy Secretary of Health Quality Assurance on the implementation of the law to this point. The Deputy Secretary's presentation indicated that AHCA completed the vendor procurement for the consumer cost website, and is working with health care facilities to ensure compliance with the new transparency requirements. AHCA plans to continue outreach efforts to both consumers and providers to ensure the law's provisions are known and understood by all.



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I will keep you updated on the implementation of HB 1175 and other efforts by the Florida House to increase access to affordable healthcare for all Floridians.

## **Children, Families & Seniors Subcommittee Discusses Refugee Resettlements**

This week, the Children, Families & Seniors subcommittee reviewed an important topic regarding our state and national security: refugee resettlements. Refugees identified by a United Nations process are placed throughout the country by the U.S. Department of State, where they receive federally funded services administered by state agencies. The subcommittee received an overview of the state's Refugee Services Program from the Department of Children and Families and a presentation on refugee services by Lutheran Services Florida, which directly provides services to help refugees become a contributing part of our American society.

The subcommittee also engaged in a discussion on security issues related to refugee resettlement with experts on the issue.

I thought the most important take away from the subcommittee meeting is that the state receives very little information about any security risks posed by a refugee resettled in our state. This makes it difficult for law enforcement to take action—possibly until it is too late. Going forward, the House will seek solutions to this challenging issue.