



# 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://youtu.be/U9QLEGnnsQw>.

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** All communications distributed in mass, including in electronic format, require review and approval *prior to* distribution. The articles included below have been preapproved. However, please remember that you still need approval from the Majority Office before distributing an article if you change it or if you include it with other unapproved material. Refer to chapter 4 of the Administrative Policy Manual for more information on the House mass communications policy.

## Florida House Approves House Budget

This week, the full House passed the House’s recommended budget for 2016-2017. Our budget cuts wasteful pork barrel spending while funding our state’s critical needs, including significant investments in education. The House budget also includes \$2.2 billion in tax cuts for parents, students, teachers, veterans, job creators, homeowners, and many other Floridians. Finally, the budget responsibly plans for the future by placing a record \$3.6 billion in reserves to prepare for any unforeseen future economic uncertainty.

This budget not only saves taxpayers money by eliminating wasteful spending and cutting taxes, but will secure long term budget surpluses while ensuring our state’s critical needs are met.

## House Passes “Schools of Hope” Bill

The Florida House passed a bill this week that would promote improved student performance, increase accountability of failing schools, and establish the Schools of Hope program.

Currently, schools with a 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, or 8<sup>th</sup> grade class must implement an early warning system to identify students who need additional support to improve academic performance. The bill expands the range of schools that must implement an early warning system to schools that serve any student in kindergarten through 8<sup>th</sup> grade. I believe this expansion will help ensure less children fall behind.

The bill streamlines the school improvement process and increases accountability of persistently low performing schools. Schools will be required to immediately implement intervention and support strategies if the school earns a “D” or “F” and school districts will have increased flexibility to address the needs of those schools.

The bill authorizes the establishment of “Schools of Hope” to provide students in areas of persistently low-performing schools with a high-quality education option designed to close the opportunity gap and increase student achievement.

I was proud to support this bill on the House floor. Too many children are stuck in failing schools for far too long, and this bill will prevent that from continuing.



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## **Best & Brightest Programs Bill Passes House Floor**

The Florida House passed HB 7069, which would help attract and retain the best teachers and principals in schools throughout our state.

The bill would expand the Best & Brightest Teachers Program. Under the current program, teachers who scored in the 80<sup>th</sup> percentile or higher on the ACT or SAT, at the time they took the exam, are eligible for a bonus of up to \$10,000 if they are rated as highly-effective by teacher evaluations. The bill would grow this good program expanding the current eligibility standards and recognizing other national, standardized assessments including the LSAT, GRE, GMAT, and the MCAT.

The bill would also create the Best & Brightest Principals Program. This program would provide a financial reward and increased autonomy over personnel and budget decisions to principals that have been with their school for at least two years and have a high number of Best & Brightest teachers.

I was happy to support the bill because attracting and retaining the best teachers and principals is essential to our students' success.

## **House Votes to Modernize the Florida Retirement System**

The Florida Retirement System (FRS) offers government employees two options to save for retirement: the pension plan, a traditional defined benefit plan; and the investment plan, a defined contribution plan. This week, the House passed a bill to modernize and improve the system. Some notable provisions in the bill include the following.

First, the bill changes the default from the pension plan to the investment plan for new employees who do not select either plan during the six-month election period after they are hired.

Second, the bill expands survivor benefits for spouses and children of employees who were killed in the line of duty. The benefits for police officers, firefighters, and all other employees would be retroactive to 2002.

Third, the bill prevents newly elected officials initially enrolled in the FRS Elected Officers' Class, on or after July 1, 2018, from participating in the pension plan. They will only have the option to participate in the investment plan.

Finally, the bill allows renewed membership into the investment plan or other optional retirement program for a retiree of the investment plan or other retirement program if they return to employment with an FRS employer.

I believe these reforms will help ensure government employees can select a retirement plan that best fits their particular needs and ensure the spouses and children of government employees who were killed in the line of duty receive all possible benefits.



## Judiciary Committee Passes Bill to Fight Human Trafficking

The Florida House is committed to fighting the perpetrators of human trafficking. The House is also committed to supporting victims of human trafficking who have to endure such deeply horrific circumstances.

This week, the Judiciary Committee passed a bill that would create a new cause of action for victims of human trafficking and allow the Attorney General to file the cause of action on behalf of the victim. If a victim or the Attorney General wins his or her case, in addition to any other award imposed, the court has to award a civil penalty against each defendant in the amount of \$100,000 and enter judgment in favor of the prevailing victim or the Attorney General. Importantly, this penalty is in addition to, and not in lieu of, any punitive damage award.

Further, if a law enforcement agency rescued the victim or located the property upon which the abuse or exploitation of a victim or victims had occurred, the court has to impose a civil penalty against the defendant in the civil action and in favor of the law enforcement agency in the amount of \$50,000 for the benefit of the law enforcement agency's future efforts to combat human trafficking.

The bill also provides for civil judicial forfeiture proceedings that may be brought by the victim or Attorney General against the real and personal property of a person who knowingly participated in human trafficking. Forfeiture may also be filed against property where the owner allowed human trafficking to happen by willful blindness.

I strongly support this good bill. We cannot take our foot off the pedal when it comes to fighting human trafficking.

## Committee Passes Bill to Get Tougher on Domestic Violence

The Judiciary Committee passed a bill that would strengthen laws against domestic violence.

The bill would require a court to order certain domestic violence offenders to attend *and complete* a batterer's intervention program (BIP). A failure to complete BIP would result in a violation of probation, subjecting the offender to further criminal penalty.

The bill would increase mandatory jail time for offenders who have been adjudicated guilty and who intentionally caused bodily harm to another, and further increase the penalty if, in addition to the previous two factors, the violence was committed in the presence of a related child under 16 years old.

The bill would also prohibit a court from withholding the adjudication of a defendant when he or she committed a third degree felony offense of domestic violence. The court would be prohibited from doing so, unless one of the following exceptions applies:

- The state attorney makes a written request for adjudication to be withheld; or
- The court makes written findings that the withholding of adjudication is reasonably justified based on the circumstances or statutory mitigating factors.



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I support this bill because there is no room in our great state for domestic violence.

## **House Committee Passes Motor Vehicle Insurance Bill**

The Commerce Committee passed HB 1063, which would reform motor vehicle insurance in Florida. The goal of HB 1063 is to increase access to meaningful insurance while bringing accountability and responsibility to the system.

Personal Injury Protection (PIP) is also known as the Florida Motor Vehicle No-Fault Law and requires vehicle owners and drivers to obtain no-fault coverage. PIP along with property damage coverage of \$10,000, are the only insurance coverages required for all Florida drivers at the time of vehicle registration. However, the Financial Responsibility Law requires all Florida drivers at fault in an accident to be accountable for bodily injuries or deaths (BI) up to \$10,000 for one person, and \$20,000 for two or more persons. BI coverage may be secured through insurance or other means following an accident.

PIP offers up to \$10,000 for various personal injuries that may occur in a car accident, regardless of fault. Legislators attempted to revise PIP multiple times, due to the rampant fraud found in the system. Unfortunately, these efforts have not fixed the problems. Fraud and abuse in the PIP system continue and have caused premiums to rise in recent years, placing additional financial burdens on Floridians.

HB 1063 would resolve these issues in the current system by ending mandatory PIP coverage and replacing it with mandatory BI coverage that must be obtained prior to registering a vehicle. The bill focuses on personal responsibility and does away with the flawed no-fault system. Under the bill, drivers will have to obtain BI coverage that covers, at a minimum, \$25,000 in damages due to bodily injury or death to one person, and \$50,000 for two or more persons. Thirty-eight states have a similar system.

I support this bill because it will bring much needed personal responsibility and accountability to our motor vehicle insurance system and will help decrease premiums for Florida drivers.