

FLORIDA SENATE MAJORITY OFFICE

SENATOR BILL GALVANO, MAJORITY LEADER



This Week in the Florida Senate

February 29-March 4, 2016

Senate Bill 1360, Student Assessments

Florida's commitment to a world class, results-oriented education system was advanced Tuesday when the Senate Appropriations Committee approved Senate Bill 1360. This bill reduces the amount of assessments Florida students are required to take by establishing performance-based alternative means for students to demonstrate subject area, grade-level competency, and college and career readiness. Last year, the Legislature conducted a thorough, independent review and evaluation of federal, state, and local K-12 assessment and evaluation requirements. The result was several common sense changes to Florida's education system to increase transparency, improve flexibility, and limit testing while maintaining a strong accountability system for students, parents, teachers, schools administrators, and taxpayers. SB 1360 allows districts to opt into performance-based alternative assessments, which will reduce duplicative testing. In such districts, parents are able to opt out of the performance based alternative assessment and default to the statewide standardized assessment if desired.

Senate Committee Passes Broad-Based Tax Relief Package

The Senate Appropriations Committee on Thursday passed unanimously House Bill 7099, Taxation, to deliver \$400 million in broad-based tax relief for Florida families and business. The 2016-17 tax package includes a rollback on Florida's millage rates, establishes a 3-day Back-to-School Sales Tax Holiday, and permanently eliminates the sales tax on manufacturing machinery and equipment.

As Florida's economy improves, property values across our state are rising, bringing increased equity to residential and commercial property owners across our state. Unfortunately, the practical impact of rising property values is higher property taxes. This year, the Legislature is taking important steps to mitigate that impact by reducing local millage rates and using only state tax dollars to pay for a \$478 million increase in education funding. This is a win-win scenario for our state. K-12 per student funding is at an all-time high, but state taxes dollars, rather than the property taxes of local homeowners and businesses, will cover the cost of the increase.

This bill promotes private sector job creation and business expansion by permanently eliminating the sales tax on machinery and manufacturing equipment. This important savings can be a big difference for businesses looking to locate and expand in our state. Making this existing exemption permanent is a priority for Governor Scott, and we are pleased to support his efforts to make Florida first in the nation in job creation.

The Legislature also recognizes that families incur a significant expense while preparing to send children back to school. HB 7099 will lessen this burden on Floridians throughout our state as they purchase school supplies, clothing and other items during a 3-day Back-To-School Sales Tax Holiday this summer. For more information on House Bill 7099, please visit www.FLSenate.gov.

House Bill 7101, Sentencing for Capital Felonies

In January 2016, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled Florida's capital sentencing structure unconstitutional, stating the Sixth Amendment requires a jury, not a judge, to find each fact necessary to impose a sentence of death. Upon receiving this ruling, the Legislature began the work of ensuring Florida's death penalty sentencing is constitutional. On Thursday, the Senate passed House Bill 7101 to require jurors to unanimously find that at least one aggravating factor exists before a defendant can be eligible for a death sentence and requires at least 10 out of 12 jury members to recommend death for the sentence to be imposed. The judge is permitted to impose a sentence of life imprisonment without the possibility of parole even if the jury recommends a sentence of death, but cannot "override" the jury's recommendation of a sentence of life imprisonment by imposing a death sentence. This bill will now be sent to Governor Scott for his review and approval.

Senate Bill 1722, Termination of Pregnancies

This week, the Senate Fiscal Policy Committee passed Senate Bill 1722 to increase state oversight of abortion facilities. Florida is taking the appropriate steps to make sure fetal remains are disposed of properly and to ensure clinics and practitioners who perform these procedures are held to the same medical standards as other facilities where similar outpatient procedures are performed. SB 1722 adds protections for women by ensuring practitioners have the proper protocols in place to provide medical care should complications occur following an abortion. Abortion clinics that perform first and second trimester abortions must have a transfer agreement or admitting privileges with a local hospital so that all physicians who perform abortions can provide the appropriate medical treatment if needed.

The legislation extends the current prohibition against the sale and donation of fetal remains from an abortion by specifying limits on any disposal of fetal remains and increases penalties for improper disposal. SB 1722 also restricts state agencies, local governmental entities, and Medicaid managed care plans from contracting with, or expending funds for the benefit of, an organization which owns, operates, or is affiliated with facilities that perform abortions. The bill enhances reporting requirements to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention standards for abortion clinics, provides for tougher licensure inspections by the Agency for Health Care Administration (AHCA), and requires AHCA to promptly investigate all credible allegations of unlicensed abortions being performed.