

THIS WEEK IN THE FLORIDA SENATE

DECEMBER 12-16, 2016

Excellence in Higher Education

Focusing on solutions to make our great Florida universities even better is a top priority for Senate President Joe Negron. Over the next two years, our Republicans caucus is committed to developing an aggressive and comprehensive higher education agenda that boosts the strength and competitiveness of our state's higher education system as our primary economic engine to drive vibrant, sustainable economic development and growth in high-paying jobs.

To that end, the Senate Committee on Education and the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Higher Education heard presentations and public testimony on various issues that impact the quality, cost, and accessibility of higher education in Florida. The committees discussed ways to improving 4-year graduation rates at our state universities, as well as steps we can take to further foster relationships between our state colleges and state universities to improve the 2 + 2 path to graduation.

Amendment 2 – Use of Medical Marijuana

The Senate Health Policy Committee conducted a workshop regarding the implementation of Florida Constitutional Amendment 2 (2016) – Use of Medical Marijuana for Debilitating Medical Conditions. This past November, 71 percent of voters supported the constitutional amendment to expand the legalized use of medical marijuana for patients suffering from various debilitating medical conditions.

The Department of Health's Office of Compassionate Use provided an overview of the current law and implementation to date. The committee heard from a number of stakeholders and will continue to listen to feedback from patients, physicians, and others as they work to develop legislation to implement this amendment. Fidelity to the constitution is a guiding principle of the Republican Caucus of the Senate and GOP senators are committed to fully and faithfully implementing the will of the people who overwhelmingly supported this amendment to our state constitution.

Workers' Compensation Insurance

The Senate Committee on Banking and Insurance heard a presentation and received public testimony regarding workers' compensation insurance. The presentation and public testimony focused on the more than decade old reforms the Legislature previously made to the workers' compensation system and addressed affordability and other issues.

Public testimony also addressed recent Florida Supreme Court decisions that rolled back portions of those reforms, the recent 14.5 percent workers' compensation rate increases, and the impact this increase has on employers and employees throughout Florida. Senators are currently looking into solutions that would help business owners affected by the 14.5 percent increase.

Statewide Medicaid Managed Care

The Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Health and Human Services heard an overview and update on the Long-Term Care Component of Statewide Medicaid Managed Care from the Agency for Health Care Administration (AHCA). The Statewide Medicaid Managed Care program has two components: The Long-Term Care (LTC) Program and the Managed Medical Assistance Program (MMA). The LTC program covers Floridians living in medical facilities or those who are able to live at home, but require community based services. The committee will continue to evaluate the program and consider solutions that will best meet the needs of Floridians in need of medical services, in an efficient and cost-effective manner.

Happy Holidays!

As we conclude our last legislative meetings of 2016, and gather to celebrate with family and friends during this holiday season, we are reflecting upon our many blessings and those things which are truly important. We remember our military servicemen and women, and their families, in our thoughts and prayers this holiday season. Many of them are away from their family during this special time of the year protecting the freedoms we so richly enjoy.

We are blessed to live in a nation where people of different faiths and backgrounds have the freedom to worship, celebrate, and carry out family traditions. Let us also remember to be kind to others and keep in mind those who are less fortunate. Best wishes for a wonderful holiday season! May your new year be filled with peace, good health, and prosperity.