



THIS WEEK IN THE FLORIDA SENATE
JANUARY 16 - 19, 2018

Senate Takes Action to End Florida's Opioid Addiction Crisis

Senate Bill 8, sponsored by Senator Lizbeth Benacquisto, and cosponsored by Senators Keith Perry, Kelli Stargel, Aaron Bean, and Kathleen Passidomo, unanimously passed the Senate Committee on Health Policy. The bill makes a number of changes to Florida law with the goal of preventing people from becoming addicted to opioids, and helping to provide relief to those individuals and families who are already dealing with addiction.

The legislation would establish a three day supply limit when prescribing a Schedule II controlled substance for the treatment of acute pain associated with surgery, trauma, or serious illness. A seven day supply limit may be prescribed if the prescriber, in his or her professional judgement, believes the dosage is medically necessary to treat the patient's pain or medical condition.

In addition, the bill removes barriers to treatment for individuals who are struggling with an opioid use disorder. Currently, in order for a physician to prescribe medication-assisted treatment (MAT) drugs, such as methadone, buprenorphine, or naltrexone, many insurers require physicians to submit a prior authorization request before the insurer will approve the treatment. The authorization period can cause a delay in treatment at a time when patients need it most, and this change will allow patients to begin treatment and to receive services immediately. The use of MAT has shown to be effective at reducing the risk of opioid dependence and overdoses.

Updates are proposed to the continuing education requirements for licensed prescribing practitioners, and requires that they complete a two hour board-approved course on prescribing controlled substances as part of a biennial license renewal. Additionally, the bill requires mandatory participation in the Prescription Drug Monitoring Program (PDMP) by prescribers and dispensers before prescribing or dispensing controlled substances. Currently, Florida is one of four states that does not share PDMP data between states, and this bill would allow the Department of Health to enter into sharing agreements with other states' programs.

The updates in this bill do not affect the long-term treatment plans that patients have established with their physicians to treat chronic pain or terminal illnesses. The pain management regulations proposed in the bill focus rather on dosing limitations to help reshape how healthcare providers have been taught to approach opioid therapy.

The opioid epidemic claims 16 lives per day in the State of Florida. Deaths from opioids are on the rise, many specifically from heroin overdoses, and increasingly, fentanyl overdoses. Many of those users started with a prescribed medication, but moved to a cheaper alternative. Strong action must be taken now to curb this horrible epidemic. Senate Bill 8 is the first step in the right direction and provides viable solutions to a complex issue, while appropriating over \$53 million to help combat the rampant opioid crisis in our state.

Legislation Elevating Florida’s Nationally Recognized College System Advances

The Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Higher Education passed Senate Bill 540, the “Community College Competitiveness Act of 2018,” sponsored by Senator Dorothy Hukill. This comprehensive legislation further elevates the standing and visibility of Florida’s nationally-ranked community colleges through a renewed focus on student success, as well as streamlines the governing structure of Florida’s Community College System to better reinforce its distinct mission.

Community College Competitiveness Act supports the over 800,000 full-time and part-time students enrolled in Florida’s community colleges by expanding transfer options through new 2+2 targeted pathways to graduation, and by expanding strategic academic advising to help students save time and money, maximizing the return on their investment.

In addition, with a mission that is uniquely separate from the role of the K-12 and state university systems, the Community College Competitiveness Act restores a State Board to oversee the 28 institutions in the system. Currently, community colleges are included within the K-20 system governed by the State Board of Education. Furthermore, the bill requires student and faculty representation to sit on the Board, bringing voices to the table from those directly impacted by decisions being made.

Veteran-Friendly Legislation Advances

The Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation, Tourism, and Economic Development unanimously passed Senate Bill 328, Veteran Identification, sponsored by Senator Dennis Baxley. The bill directs the Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles (DHSMV) to create a \$10 veteran identification card to be used by veterans.

The identification card can be used to obtain discounts or fee waivers, and it would be available to veterans who have been honorably discharged. The card will display a full-face photo of the veteran, the veteran’s branch of service, and the date of discharge. Additionally, the words “Proof of Veteran Status” will be displayed at the bottom of the card.



Florida currently offers numerous benefits that are available to veterans such as fee waivers for veterans and their spouses, and incentives for business entities with majority ownership held by a veteran or a spouse of a veteran. Senate Bill 328 recognizes the contributions of our veterans and will help solidify Florida’s reputation as the most veteran-friendly state in the nation.