

## THIS WEEK IN THE FLORIDA SENATE

OCTOBER 9 - 13, 2017

### Senate Education Committee Passes Legislation to Expand Bright Futures Scholarship

The Senate Committee on Education passed Senate Bill 4, the Florida Excellence in Higher Education Act of 2018. Senator Galvano's bill expands the state university and student financial aid portions of the higher education agenda the Senate advanced last session. Included in the bill are provisions for the permanent expansion of the Bright Futures Academic Scholar award at 100 percent of tuition and fees, and the Bright Futures Medallion Scholar award at 75 percent of tuition and fees.



These key changes will make it clear to approximately 94,000 students (the number expected to qualify for new or renewed Academic or Medallion award) that the Bright Futures Scholarship is here to stay.

Senate Bill 4 also expands merit-based and need-based financial aid funding, and establishes flexible tuition policies. As Florida students and their families plan for their investment in a college or university education, they deserve financial security and peace of mind throughout their academic journey. Every student in Florida who qualifies and earns the privilege to attend one of our state universities should have the opportunity to pursue a higher education; however, for many of our students that is an unattainable goal due to financial burdens. With these permanent changes in law, we can help alleviate financial concerns that all too often delay graduation.

### The Senate Committee on Health Policy Conducts Workshop on Opioid Addiction Crisis

The committee devoted the entirety of the meeting to receiving feedback from a panel of experts, and to discussing comprehensive solutions regarding the opioid addiction crisis affecting the entire state. The committee heard from physicians and behavioral health providers, as well as representatives from the insurance industry and law enforcement. The panel of experts emphasized the importance of Medication-Assisted Treatment, long-term counseling, and peer recovery support services as part of the solution to fighting this epidemic. Florida is currently under a statewide public health emergency due to the opioid addiction crisis and has received \$27 million in federal grant funds to provide to local communities.

### Senate Committees Receive Feedback Regarding the Impacts of Hurricane Irma

Several Senate committees dedicated substantial time to discuss and receive feedback from various state agencies and other entities regarding the impacts on the state caused by Hurricane Irma. Listed below are the topics that were discussed. Additionally, the Senate website includes a video archives section where these important committee meetings can be viewed online at the following link: <http://www.flsenate.gov/Media/Videos>.

- Commerce and Tourism Committee conducted a panel discussion regarding consequences and responses of Florida tourism and businesses.
- Education Committee received presentations on emergency coordination efforts of state and local entities.
- Banking and Insurance Committee heard a presentation on hurricane insurance issues.
- Communications, Energy and Public Utilities heard Hurricane Irma related presentations by the Public Service Commission and investor owned utilities.
- Appropriations Subcommittee on the Environment and Natural Resources heard hurricane related presentations on water infrastructure needs, state parks, beaches, and derelict vessels.
- Appropriations Subcommittee on Health and Human Services received an update on Emergency Rules relating to nursing facility and assisted living facility emergency power plans.
- Appropriations Subcommittee on General Government heard presentations regarding Florida infrastructure assessments post-hurricane.
- Agriculture Committee conducted a panel discussion on the impact of Hurricane Irma to Florida agriculture.
- Appropriations Committee heard presentations and discussed the fiscal impact of Hurricane Irma for the current year and next year's state budget.

### New Online Voter Registration Website Goes Live



The state's new online voter registration website, [RegisterToVoteFlorida.gov](http://RegisterToVoteFlorida.gov), was launched on Sunday, October 1, 2017, giving Florida residents another way to register to vote or update existing registrations. The Florida Department of State, as directed by the Legislature in [Section 97.0525, Florida Statutes](#), has been working over the last two years to

create and implement the online voter registration website. The new website will help generate cost savings for tax payers by reducing the number of paper applications and enhancing government efficiency. For more information regarding online registration, please visit [RegisterToVoteFlorida.gov](http://RegisterToVoteFlorida.gov).