MEMORANDUM

TO: All Senators

FROM: Kathleen Passidomo

SUBJECT: Special Session C

DATE: October 20, 2023

Given recent events including the horrific attacks against Israel in the Middle East and devastation to the Big Bend caused by Hurricane Idalia here at home, in coordination with the Governor's Office and the Florida House, we have identified several issues that warrant our attention in advance of the 2024 Regular Session. As such, Speaker Renner and I will convene the Legislature in Special Session C, beginning on Monday, November 6, and ending on Thursday, November 9. The Joint Proclamation is attached. General information regarding special session issues is below, and an updated schedule for the week of November 6 is attached. The special session will coincide our previously scheduled interim committee week. As such, the prior travel authorization remains in effect.

Special Session Issues:

Hurricane Relief
Each storm is different, and the resources needed for long-term recovery vary dramatically across our state. Nearly two months have passed since Hurricane Idalia devastated areas of the Big Bend, and as we have seen our neighbors and communities begin the work towards recovery, we have an understanding of key actions that we can take now to ensure a full recovery for impacted families, business, and communities.

For example, we know Idalia's impact on our agriculture industry was catastrophic and debris removal remains a challenge. As we did following Hurricanes Ian and Nicole, during the special session, we will build on the tremendous and ongoing state response to Hurricane Idalia with key funding to support the Floridians and communities who are recovering and rebuilding. This includes tax relief for families and businesses, key assistance for agriculture and aquaculture producers, and aid for local governments.

Support for Israel
I am grateful to all of the Senators who joined in person, and in spirit, earlier in the week as Speaker Renner and I announced a presiding officer's proclamation in support of the State of Israel. During the Special Session, as a full Senate, we will have the opportunity to formally express support for the State of Israel to exist as a sovereign, independent nation, with the right to defend itself and protect its citizens from indiscriminate violence and terrorism; condemn the unprovoked and barbaric attacks by terrorist regimes, including Hamas, against Israel, its citizens, and Americans; and demand the immediate end to any financial support, whether directly or indirectly, to the regime of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Hamas, Hezbollah, or other entities that publicly support these attacks.

Expanded Sanctions Against Terrorist Regimes
As the war continues to rage into a third week, with each passing day, we learn more about the atrocities Hamas and other terror groups are waging against the Israeli people. While our laws already have strong sanctions against regimes that support terrorism, a conflict of this scale certainly warrants a fresh look at further steps we can take to strengthen existing sanctions against the Islamic Republican of Iran and other state and corporate sponsors of terror. We can, and we must, do everything within our authority as a state government to support Israel and condemn terror, hatred, and violence.

Additional Security Infrastructure to Guard Against Anti-Semitic Violence, Hate Crimes
We must also be careful to guard against threats on the home front. In recent years, we have increased state support for security at our Jewish Day Schools. With incidents of anti-Semitism on the rise, we need to make certain that entities at risk for hate crimes have the security resources and infrastructure they need.

Additional Funding for Students with Unique Abilities
HB 1 (2023) expanded eligibility for school choice scholarships to all Florida students. With the start of the new school year, we are seeing an increase in the number of students with unique abilities applying for the scholarship. Students with unique abilities receive additional funding for their scholarships, depending on their needs. During the special session, we will address demand for the unique abilities portion of the Family Empowerment Scholarship by providing a mechanism to increase the number of students served that the higher amount.

Increased Resiliency Efforts to Help Lessen Insurance Costs
Property insurance costs continue to be top of mind for the Florida families. I understand the frustration, I share it, and I am always talking with stakeholders and trying to find new solutions. I have had several meetings this summer with representatives of insurance companies, reinsurance companies, insurance agents, our new insurance commissioner, and most importantly – constituents impacted by insurance costs. I remain committed to reforms we passed in 2022 and earlier this year, but I know those measures will take time to impact the market in a meaningful way. The good news is we are already seeing new insurers and new private capital enter Florida.

With that said, current insurance prices are taking a toll on family budgets. High priced items like a new roof or storm windows can make homes safer, while reducing insurance premiums, yet these resiliency enhancements can be out of reach for many families. Among the reforms passed last year to help stabilize the property insurance market and reduce cost for homeowners, the My Safe Florida Home Program has been widely popular. We have seen heavy utilization of this initiative by families across the state who are seeking to fortify their homes against natural disasters while at the same time reducing their property insurance premiums. During the special session, we would like to address the backlog of applications for the current program, and begin the discussion of steps we can take to support this initiative moving forward.

Thank you for your attention to these important matters. I look forward to seeing you in two weeks.