

LORANNE AUSLEY

STATE SENATOR DISTRICT 3

The Ausley Update
— Legislative Update —



Senate Offices

-Tallahassee-

202 Senate Building
404 South Monroe Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1100
(850) 487-5003

-Quincy-

20 East Washington Street
Suite D
Quincy, FL 32351
(850) 627-0474

Dear Constituent and Friend,

It's the end of Week 6 and it has been another busy one.

The differing Senate and House versions of the fiscal year 2021-22 budget officially passed in their respective chambers this week. This is just a starting point for negotiations with the House, and while I voted for the budget, I do have some concerns. The budget currently includes cuts to hospitals and health care; and yet, we are still not having even a conversation about Medicaid expansion - which would provide health insurance for almost 1 million Floridians. In spite of a statewide shortage of affordable and workforce housing, the Senate budget sweeps some of the housing trust fund for other purposes. And a troubling proposal to consolidate and possibly close some of our prisons would have a devastating impact on our fiscally constrained counties. I spent the day Tuesday visiting some of the institutions in the western part of the district to hear directly from correctional officers, wardens and staff to be sure I was able to advocate clearly what this proposal would do to their institutions. I also spoke to city and county officials across the district to better understand the significant economic impacts of a potential prison closure. Prisons are the number one or two employer in many counties across Senate District 3, so I am watching this very closely. I appreciate everyone who reached out – please know that you are helping me paint the picture of how catastrophic this would be to our rural communities.



In addition to the budget, the Senate voted on several bills of concern including proposals for changes to the Bright Futures program, and MAJOR changes to Florida Retirement System (FRS) – I voted no on both bills. I have grave concerns about the changes to Florida's pension system which has a long history as one of the best managed retirement systems in the country. It is a \$164 billion system serving more than 1 million members – active and retired teachers, firefighters, law enforcement officers, public health officials, emergency management officials and the staff in the very building we were debating in. The bill would close the Defined Contribution plan for all new hires, with an exception of the Special Risk Class which includes police officers and firefighters. Those supporting the bill argue that this change would only impact new hires, but I believe that any changes we make to the front end of the pension plan are very likely to have an impact on the long term viability of the entire FRS. We have made a fundamental promise to our dedicated and hardest working Floridians. Our public employees work incredibly hard for all of us, often for less pay - in exchange for this, we have made them a promise of a secure and solid retirement as a member of the Florida Retirement System. This bill breaks that fundamental promise and I will continue to voice my opposition in hopes that it will not be brought up in the House.



On the bright side – my bill SB 1560 to expand broadband for all passed its second committee stop and will move on to the Appropriations Committee which will be the last stop before heading to the Senate Floor. I am continuing to work with other Senators and stakeholders to ensure that we leave this Session with a comprehensive plan to move forward with a rural deployment strategy as well as a plan to promote more affordability to close the urban digital divide.

Next week we should begin negotiations on the budget, which will include discussions of the additional federal dollars that Florida will be receiving as part of the American Rescue Plan. I am working hard with budget staff on innovative ways to use these unprecedented resources to make transformational changes to help our communities recover from the health and economic crises of the past year. Please let me know if you have thoughts about this – and stay in touch!

Ausley.Loranne.web@flsenate.gov or 850-487-5003.

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2021 SESSION DATES

March 2, 2021: Regular Session convenes

April 30, 2021: 60th day – last day of Regular Session

AUSLEY's HIGHLIGHTS



Remember, if you have a company, event or person that should be highlighted as part of our newsletter or that I should attend please share them by emailing me at ausley.loranne.web@flsenate.gov.

It is an honor and pleasure to serve you in the Florida Senate!

Sincerely,

Loranne Ausley
Senator District 3

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