

FEA Frontline Report

2020 Legislative Session

Week 8 – Day 53

March 6, 2020

Session will (likely) be extended

Queue the crying lobbyists: We STILL don't have budget allocations with seven days left in the regular session. Logistically that means the budget can't be finalized prior to Tuesday for the legislature to *Sine Die* and end on time. That doesn't mean we aren't kept busy – this is the time in session when we play amendment whack-a-mole and work to kill bad bills and keep the subject of bills we don't like off other bills still moving – a la trains.

Bills

Union Busting

[HB 1](#) by Rep. Jamie Grant (R-Tampa) was heard on the House floor this week. We thank Reps. Margaret Good (D-Sarasota) and Javier Fernandez (D-Coral Gables) for running amendments to highlight the worst provisions. While we knew the amendments would fail, they certainly highlight the worst parts of the legislation. After questions and debate from our friends, the bill ultimately passed 63-52, with eight Republicans joining the Democrats and standing with FEA and our union brothers and sisters. We thank Reps. Aloupis (R-Miami), Clemons (R-Jonesville), Duggan (R-Jacksonville) LaMarca (R-Lighthouse Point), Latvala (R-Clearwater), Plasencia (R-Titusville), A. Rodriguez (R-Miami) and Santiago (R-Deltona) for standing with FEA. HB 1's Senate companion, [SB 804](#), has yet to be heard in a single committee of reference and therefore should be on death's door as we head into the final week of session.

Education Train

[SB 62](#), an omnibus education bill included some good concepts such as establishing the statutory language to create the new salary increase categorical in the Florida Education Finance Program (FEFP) and alleviate school mental health counselor-to-student ratios. It also included some bad concepts such as requiring local school districts that adopt a capital outlay surtax referendum to share the funds proportionally with charter schools (and allow charter schools to use the funds for any non-needs based capital improvement projects).

Prior to the Senate Appropriations committee, however, the sponsor, Sen. Kelli Stargel (R-Lakeland) dropped a [115-page delete-all amendment](#) that expanded to include the Best & Brightest bonus repeal (why, we have no idea given that SB 486 by Sen. Bradley had already passed the full Senate unanimously), the Seclusion and Restraint bill language from SB 1644 (see below for more detail) and language that would allow segregation of students by allowing a developer who built a community and spent more than \$5 million to have 50 percent of the seats of a charter school built inside the neighborhood.

Thanks to our friends on the committee, legislators stalled and the clock ran out on this bill. We expect that this bill (or the components of this bill) will pop up somewhere else, if the Senate doesn't decide to waive the rules and have another appropriations committee meeting before the final days.

Seclusion and Restraint – Cameras in Classrooms

Last week we told you about [HB 1231](#) and [SB 1644](#) – the students with disabilities bill that proposes to put cameras in self-contained classrooms of children who are emotionally and behaviorally challenged. As passed in its second committee, the bill was amended to include a three-year pilot project for only Broward and Volusia self-contained classrooms and not put cameras in all 67 counties. If passed, the bill would require all 67 counties to provide professional development and training on proper seclusion and restraint methods, and appropriate reporting requirements which FEA has worked for years with the sponsors to get in a posture that we support.

HB 1231 was placed on the Special Order calendar for March 6 and the sponsor, Rep. DuBose (D-Fort Lauderdale), has filed two amendments – one mirroring the pilot project for Broward and Volusia counties, and one amendment to fully remove the cameras from the bill. As we near the 55th day of session, when bills can no longer be placed on the Special Order calendar, we know today will be a marathon day for the House, and the House may not take up the bill until late.

As mentioned above, the entire language of SB 1644 was placed into the train bill SB 62, which died in committee when time ran out. We will be watching closely to see when and where the language from this bill pops up again in the Senate.

Vouchers

On Tuesday, Senate Appropriations heard [SB 1220](#) – K-12 Scholarship Programs by Sen. Diaz (R-Hialeah), which was a delete-all amendment that would limit the bill to solely voucher expansion. As amended, the bill would expand the Family Empowerment voucher to require an automatic escalator of eligible students by 28,000 each year. A 400 percent increase from last year, more than tripling the funding taken from traditional public schools in the next two years and increases the income limits to 260 percent of the federal poverty level, an increase of over 40 percent.

In committee, there were poignant questions and debate from both sides of the aisle. Sen. Tom Lee (R-Brandon) wanted more data about what happens to our students who enter and exit the state's voucher programs. "One of the challenges we're having is trying to get data back on charter school performance and private school performance as it relates to these programs. One of the anecdotes is that the ones who fall out of the program and come back actually performed below their peers as it relates to their income level," stated Sen. Lee. Sen. Montford (D-Tallahassee) followed up Sen. Lee's comments and stated that "at some point we have to get some data for when kids leave and come back. We need more data to ensure we're providing the absolute best education to our children and what impact it has on our public schools. At some point if a district loses several students, they'll have to find alternatives, whether it be cutting a program or staff." We couldn't agree more, senators.

Sen. Thurston (D-Fort Lauderdale) expanded on this and mentioned the drain these programs have on our traditional public school system. "With 28,000 students at \$7,837 per student that's \$219.4 million dollars and, that in addition to the drain to the public school system prior to this, is a continuation that negatively impacts public schools to a large extent."

There's a very good reason that the data, which is currently being collected, is not being disseminated to the public: It's negative. Often our children enter the voucher system only to end up worse off than when they started, at the cost of over a billion dollars a year. We are, in the state of Florida, systematically undermining our traditional public schools and our children's academic wellbeing and paying over a billion dollars to do it.

The bill passed by a party line 13-8 vote and is expected to be heard on the Senate floor next week.

College and University Presidential Searches

[HB 7081](#) would take public college and university presidential searches out of the sunshine and allow for one of the most impactful decisions for students, faculty and staff to be made in the dark. The bill was heard by the full House this week and passed by a 99-20 vote. UFF-FEA was joined in opposing this bill by the AFL-CIO as well as the First Amendment Foundation.

The Senate's version of this secrecy measure, [SB 774](#), is on second reading in the Senate and has not yet been placed on the Special Order calendar (the date by which the bill will be heard). The good news is that since the bill provides a public records exemption, it requires a two-thirds majority for passage instead of a simple majority, and the bill has faced stiff opposition in its Senate committee meetings.

Are you coming to Tallahassee?

Big thank you to our leaders and members who traveled to Tallahassee this week. Only one week to go! We are working closely with the AFL-CIO Working Families Lobby Corps. Be sure to let us know when to expect you via [AFL-CIO Working Families Lobby Corps "I'm coming" tab](#), and book your hotels ASAP. If you have any questions about coming to Tallahassee, please don't hesitate to contact Tina Dunbar at Tina.Dunbar@floridaea.org.

Questions? Call PPA at 850-224-2078

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Thanks to Yale Olenick and Eric Riley for assisting with the content this week!