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Florida Education Association

# *Frontline Report*

## *2021 Legislative Session*

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*Week 5 - Day 32*

*April 2, 2021*

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### *Happy Holidays*

This week the Legislature had a short work week due to the Passover and Easter holidays. But that didn't slow the amount of work the Legislature tackled: It was one of our busiest weeks yet. We have officially passed the halfway point, but questions always loom – will we end on time?

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### *Protecting our Individual Freedoms*

Like last week, the Senate gave us a reprieve this week from fighting bills that would take away your freedoms to join and maintain your union membership and direct your union dues, as neither [SB 78](#) nor [SB 1014](#) were on the Senate Rules Agenda. However, that won't be the case next week, as both SB 78 and SB 1014 are scheduled for the Senate Rules committee Tuesday, April 6 at 9:30 am. What you have been doing is working – legislators are feeling the pressure. We must continue to email and call our legislators. **Please get those [calls and emails](#) into the Rules Committee one more time in opposition to these bills!**

The Florida House of Representatives took up [HB 835](#) by Rep. Cord Byrd (R-Jacksonville Beach) in its second committee stop – the [State Administration and Technology Appropriations Subcommittee](#) – on Thursday. A great big thank you to the members and local

presidents (listed below) who traveled to Tallahassee from across Florida, along with FEA and AFL-CIO lobbyists, to testify in opposition to this bill! Because of the work our members are doing in testifying, calling and emailing committee members, we are making serious headway on this bill. Not one single Republican committee member debated in support of the bill, and Rep. Sam Killebrew (R-Winter Haven) joined Reps. Goff-Marcil (D-Maitland), Hinson (D-Gainesville), Hunschofsky (D-Coconut Creek) and Woodson (D-Pembroke Pines) in voting against the bill.

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## *Pension Battles*

**SB 84** by Sen. Ray Rodrigues (R-Fort Myers) regarding closing the Florida Retirement System (FRS) Defined Benefit (DB) program passed after many of our members testified against the bill. An amendment drafted by your FEA Public Policy team and sponsored by Sen. Farmer (D-Fort Lauderdale) would have delayed the closure until after a thorough actuarial study was completed. The amendment consisted of the important provisions mentioned by the actuary in the study commissioned by the Senate and were identified as lacking and necessary to make an educated decision for any retirement plan change. It comes as no surprise that Sen. Farmer's amendment failed.

Big thanks to Sen. Farmer and Sen. Ed Hooper (R-Pinellas) who asked great questions and added great debate for the defined benefit/pension plan. Unfortunately, this is the Senate President's bill, so Republicans were in support even if they were missing most of the required data and lacked the necessary understanding as to how the retirement system works to make an informed decision on this bill. As we've come to find out all too often, especially this session, sometimes ideologies and party lines are more important than the merit of the policy. The bill passed 12-8 on a party line vote and heads to the Senate floor. It currently has no House companion. We know that the proposed changes to FRS can be complicated to understand. If you'd like a more in-depth explanation, check out this [month's episode of Educating from the Heart](#), the podcast from FEA.

## **FRS Contribution Rates**

**SB 7018** – the “rate bill” – was also heard and passed in the Senate Appropriations Committee. This bill adjusts the contribution rates every year for employers and potentially employees in the FRS. Our members either are in the FRS Defined Benefit Plan, the FRS Defined Investment Plan, or in the Colleges or SUS Optional Retirement plans (UFF). The defined benefit plan rates are calculated annually. The total rate increase in the defined benefit plan for the employer is 0.83% in 2021-22.

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## *Budget Updates*

The good news is that this week's revenue estimating conference reports more signs of a recovering economy with state revenue exceeding projections by nearly a billion dollars over

last fall's forecast. We hope that will translate into increases in the state budget that will help our students' and schools' continued recovery after the last year.

Both chambers took up their appropriations packages and subsequent companion funding bills in the full Appropriations Committees on Wednesday. Last week we ran through a high-level overview of what was included in each of their packages. FEA lobbyists testified in the House and Senate Appropriations committees respectfully, thanking the chairs for the commitment to maintaining the \$500 million in the Teacher Salary Increase Allocation Categorical – the funds dedicated to raising starting salaries for teachers and funds for raises for other instructional personnel. They also expressed concern that maintaining the current 80/20 split exacerbates the salary compression issues that result from the restrictions in way the funding must be divided.

The House and Senate Appropriation Committees have officially certified their respective conference reports for a floor vote to take place next week. These funding packages now head to the full Senate and House for amendments and approval before we begin the budget conference process. The full state budgets differ by \$2 billion and in how the \$10 billion in federal funds from the American Rescue Program are used to support state government. The House's proposed budget comes in at \$97 billion, while the Senate Appropriations Committee approved a \$95 billion package. Both budget packages will undergo significant revisions and your public policy team will be working to make sure education funding are a priority in the state budget.

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## *In Other News*

### **Bright Futures**

[SB 86](#) by Sen. Baxley (R-Lady Lake) was also up in the Senate Appropriations Committee on Wednesday. As we discussed in last week's *Frontline*, thanks to impressive activism the bill was amended to not require a specific course of study to receive the scholarship. But, it maintains the list of careers in a “dashboard” and possible career benefits, and requires colleges and universities to provide career guidance. Two troubling aspects of the bill are the deletion of the specificity of the 100% and 75% Bright Futures levels as well as the removal of the textbook allocation to offset the high cost of textbooks and classroom materials. While this level of funding might not change, it gives pause to students and parents that the “promise” may not be kept. The next stop is the Senate Floor.

### **PreK Revamp**

This week we were able to get a clearer view of the PreK bill sponsored by Rep. Erin Grall (R-Vero Beach). The amendments that were approved on [HB 419](#) this week provide an idea of what a budget might look like for the implementation of its screening and progress monitoring requirements for PreK providers and public schools offering VPK. The bill also added options for what a review of the current payment schedule would look like and how that review may be

used to create plans to implement new models and/or schedules. We will continue to monitor this legislation as it heads to its last committee of reference before a final vote on the House Floor.

### **Presidential Searches**

The final committee to hear HB 997 Presidential Searches met Monday and passed the bill out of committee in spite of an impassioned defense of the leadership selection process conducted “in the sunshine” from UFF President Karen Morian and Rich Templin, from AFL-CIO. Four Democrats defied the majority to uphold UFF’s opposition to secret searches for college and university presidents. Standing with UFF were: Reps. McCurdy (D-Orlando), Morales (D-Orlando), Valdés (D-Tampa) and Williams (D-Ft. Lauderdale).

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### *Member Lobbyists*

**Thank you** to all members and local presidents who traveled to testify this week!

- Wade Caudle
- Kim Cook
- Doug Deters
- Michele Dillon
- Dave Galloway
- Heather Garcia
- Keith Hunter
- Resa Hunter
- Sandra Maldonado-Ross
- Scott Mazur

- Chris Pagel
  - Elizabeth Rassmussen
  - Mary Rivera
  - Bruce Sabin
  - Kim Skelton
  - Charles (Jeff) Skelton
  - Karen Stapleton
  - Patrick Strong
  - Yolanda Turner
  - Carmen Ward
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