

Florida Education Association

Frontline Report

2022 Legislative Session

Week 3

January 28, 2022

What a week! With the FEA Governance Board meeting in Tallahassee this week, we knew it would be busy, but the Legislature decided to add additional items to the agenda.

Here We Go Again...

On Thursday, the House Government Operations Subcommittee took up and passed **HB 1197** by Reps. Scott Plakon (R-Longwood) and Cord Byrd (R-Jacksonville Beach). This year's anti-union legislation would impact all public sector unions except police, firefighter and corrections officers' unions. Specifically, the bill would remove payroll deduction of dues, require an arbitrary 50 percent membership threshold, and add additional burdens for public employers to verify union membership before the union is reauthorized by the Public Employees Relations Commission (PERC).

For nearly two hours, the committee members asked pointed questions of the sponsors and did an incredible job debating against the bill. The committee also heard public testimony from more than 40 local leaders and members. We thank everyone who came to Tallahassee this week to testify against this legislation that does nothing to address the critical shortage of teachers, instructional personnel and support staff in our schools, fix the inadequate pay for our staff, or return professionalism to the teaching profession. The bill passed by a vote of 10-7, with one Republican, Rep. Anthony Rodriguez (R-Miami), joining all six Democrats (Reps. Chambliss, Hinson, McCurdy, Rayner, Skidmore and C. Smith) in opposition to the bill.

Bargaining and Evaluations

On Tuesday the House Early Learning and Elementary Education Committee considered **HB 1203**, K-12 Personnel Evaluation Procedures and Criteria by Rep. Elizabeth Fetterhoff (R-DeLand). HB 1203 would eliminate the ability for locals to collectively bargain teacher evaluations. Unfortunately, neither the sponsor nor the committee members seem to understand the process of negotiations in developing the teacher evaluation processes. Our testimony attempted to explain the complexity of teaching and the importance of working in collaboration with districts to set teacher evaluations.

Rep. Andrew Learned (D-Brandon) discussed the recent Orange County PERC finding and asked the sponsor to clarify how it would be possible to collectively bargain salaries but not evaluations, as the two are tied via performance-based pay. Unfortunately, the bill passed by a vote of 12-5. House leadership recently removed the bill's second committee of reference, fast tracking the bill and leaving only one stop before it is considered by the full House.

Let's Talk Senate Education

The Senate Education Committee passed several bills impacting education and our members:

- **SB 1294** by Sen. Joe Gruters (R-Sarasota) would permit parents to record Individual Education Plan (IEP) meetings passed by a 7-2 vote after being amended to require all participants' approval before the recording is shared.
- **SB 1300** by Sen. Gruters contains language regarding school board member salaries. The bill was amended to match the state legislator salary, which lowers the salary for about half of school board member salaries. It also modified the instructional materials transparency procedures to require ALL materials — including classroom, supplementary, digital and guest presenter materials — be pre-approved by a certified media specialist and be available on a searchable database on the school district website. Protests of the materials could be made by anyone “in the community.” “Community” is not clearly defined by the bill, so protests could even be made from out of state.
- **SB 1576**, Education Support Staff by Sen. Tina Polsky (D-Boca Raton), is a priority for the FEA and our local unions. The bill establishes a critical shortage program for education support professionals when there is a critical shortage of positions within the district. The

bill passed unanimously. We thank FEA members Kevin Daly, Charla Fox, Nora McGill, Marian Phillips, Mary Rivera, Kim Skelton, Jacqueline Stevens and Michael Woods for testifying in support of the bill.

Feeling Uncomfortable

Just like their Senate counterparts did last week, this week the House took a stab at outlining "Individual Freedoms." **HB 7**, Individual Freedoms by Rep. Bryan Avila (R-Miami), was presented to the Judiciary Committee. The bill prohibits classroom instruction and curriculum that makes students "feel uncomfortable," however, the bill encourages and requires teachers to facilitate discussions and use curricula to address sexism, slavery, racial oppression, racial segregation and racial discrimination. The bill will severely hamper teachers' ability to deliver engaging content to students that encourages critical thinking on potentially controversial issues. Several committee members and members of the public spoke against the bill. Unfortunately, the bill passed the committee by a vote of 14-7, with all the Democratic members in opposition.

Presidential Searches ... Part 3

For the third week in a row, the Senate has considered **SB 520, Presidential Searches**. As a reminder, this bill would eliminate the current requirement that searches for college and university presidents be conducted in public. United Faculty of Florida (UFF) President Andrew Gothard and approximately 15 of our members testified in committee against the bill, expressing concerns about what the bill would mean to college and university campuses across the state. Unfortunately, the bill passed on a party-line vote, 12-5. The bill will likely be heard on the Senate floor next week.

The House companion, **HB 703**, has not yet made it to its next committee stop, but we will be keeping an eye out as we progress through the session.

Florida Retirement System Update – "Rate Bill"

The annual rate bill was up in the Senate Governmental Oversight Committee on Wednesday. The rate bill establishes the contribution rates paid by employers participating in the Florida Retirement System (FRS) beginning July 1. The changes will result in the FRS trust fund receiving roughly \$176 million more on an annual basis beginning July 1. These additional costs will be borne by state agencies, universities, colleges, counties and school districts participating in the FRS. The estimated cost to school districts is \$10 million. The bill also reduces the contributions paid by employers participating in the retiree health insurance subsidy (HIS) program from 1.66 percent to 1.5 percent. This change is intended to offset the rate change costs that the employer must pay annually. These changes could lead to minor changes to the gross compensation for FRS members and may have bargaining implications.

The Final Legs of the Redistricting Process

The House Redistricting Committee met Wednesday for three hours and discussed and debated its final map proposal, with most of the meeting spent on the subject of minority-access districts. An advocate for Latino Justice noted that the Latino population has grown since the 2010 census and is now more than 26 percent of the state's population. However, the House maps only have 14 percent of the districts with a majority Hispanic population. Rep. Joe Geller (D-Aventura) called for a vote to delay the maps' approval and expressed his disapproval of the process. He mentioned that he was "concerned we have not had enough time to review the most recent changes," especially considering that some of the submissions had come out as late as Monday. The committee advanced the proposed map; Rep. Anika Omphroy (D-Lauderdale Lakes) crossed party lines and voted yes on the proposal.

Joining Us for Lobby Visits?

If you are planning to join us for a lobby visit, please make sure to do the following:

- Register with the [**Florida AFL-CIO Working Family Lobby Corps**](#) before your trip. (*Please note you will need to be vaccinated to join the Working Family Lobby Corps.*)
- Register and join [**FEA for a Lobby Visit Briefing**](#). Lobby Visit Briefings are held Mondays at 6 p.m.

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