

# Florida Education Association

# *Frontline Report*

***2023 Legislative Session***

***March 10, 2023***

## **A Brief Recap of the Week**

The first week of session is usually full of pomp and circumstance. This year, however, bills that will impact students, educators and public education began to move quickly through the process from the very first day of session.

- When Educators' Freedom Comes Under Attack, FEA Members Stand Up, Fight Back!
- Defund Public Education Bills Moving Swiftly Through Both Chambers
- But Wait, There's More
- What's on the Agenda for Next Week
- Thanks!

Read below to find out more.

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## **When Our Freedoms Come Under Attack, FEA Members Stand Up, Fight Back!**

On the first day of session, nearly 70 FEA members and other public employees including nurses, sanitation workers and electrical workers packed the Senate Governmental Oversight and Accountability Committee to speak out against [Senate Bill 256](#) (often known as the Paycheck Deception Bill). You can watch the meeting in its [entirety here](#); discussion of SB 256 starts 40:35 into the meeting and public testimony starts at 1:19:32.

Speaker after speaker shared their personal stories and asked the committee to protect their constitutional right to be a part of their union and to pay dues in the manner of their choosing. When it came to supporters of SB 256, as Sen. Tina Polsky (D-Boca Raton) pointed out, there were only three supporters, and they were all "[men in suits from think tanks and not actually people who are affected by this bill](#)." Two of those three men she referenced work for out-of-state organizations dedicated to weakening union members' rights.

While we understand Florida has much more pleasant weather than Michigan this time of year, we'd all appreciate it if folk from Betsy DeVos' funded Mackinac Center in Midland, Mich., kept their noses out of our business.

Ultimately, the Republicans on the committee turned their backs on their constituents and instead voted with the out-of-state interests. We'd provide what the Republicans on the committee said in favor of the bill, but they all remained silent when it was time to debate the bill. They didn't even have the courtesy to tell the packed room why they ignored the will of the people in favor of supporting the desires of corporations.

We appreciate Sens. Tracie Davis (D-Jacksonville), Tina Polsky (D-Boca Raton) and Darryl Rouson (D-St. Petersburg) for asking pointed questions and engaging in spirited debate with the

bill sponsor. Sen. Davis, a former teacher and union member herself, summed up SB 256 well when she said, “[It’s offensive because it feels like an attack; it feels like an attack for no reason.](#)”

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## Defund Public Education Bills Moving Swiftly Through Both Chambers

Imagine all the good that could be done if your school or worksite had an extra \$1 million to spend on staff, supplies, lab equipment, musical instruments, technology and all the other things that make teaching and learning fun and exciting.

Now imagine what your school or worksite would look like with \$1 million less next year than you currently have. [SB 202/HB 1](#) – the universal voucher bills – could very well have that drastic of an impact where you work. If you read the Frontlines sent out during interim committee weeks, you know the [Florida Policy Institute estimates passage of these bills will drain \\$4 billion](#) from our public schools and give that money to for-profit private schools. There are 3,607 traditional public schools in Florida; if each school felt the \$4 billion loss equally, it would be a loss of \$1.3 million per school next year alone.

Some supporters of the bill suggest that this bill is good for public schools because it includes a promise to deregulate them at a future date. Leon County parent and activist Marie Claire-Leman did a great job of debunking that talking point when she told the House Education Quality Subcommittee, “[the promise of deregulation feels a little bit insincere given the number of bills this session that continue to overregulate our public schools.](#)”

Sen. Corey Simon (R-Tallahassee) disputes the \$4 billion price tag; however, he hasn’t offered any alternative price. Disregarding their duty to oversee the use of public money, the Senate PreK-12 Appropriations Committee passed SB 202 out of committee without having a fiscal analysis of the bill. We thank Sens. Lauren Book (D-Plantation), Tracie Davis (D-Jacksonville), Shevrin Jones (D-Miami Gardens) and Geraldine Thompson (D-Orlando) for voting against this bill in committee. The next stop for SB 202 is the [Senate Appropriations Committee](#). HB 1 has already passed all its committee stops and is ready for a vote on the House floor as early as next week.

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## But Wait, There's More

Other bills of interest that advanced in committee this week include:

- [SB 244](#) creates a sign-on bonus for “heroes in the classroom.” These heroes are defined as retired first responders or military veterans. In addition to a sign-on bonus, these heroes may receive a bonus for teaching a course in a critical shortage area. This bill also creates the “Teachers Bill of Rights,” which is largely existing law found in [F.S. 1003.32](#). SB 244 has two committee stops left and does not have a House companion bill.
  - [HB 733](#) would adjust school start times. Starting in 2026, middle schools could start no earlier than 8 a.m. and high schools could start no earlier than 8:30 a.m. The bill does not speak to the start time of K-8 schools. This bill applies to public schools, including charter schools, and it has two committee stops left. The Senate companion, [SB 1112](#), has yet to be heard in any of its committees.
  - [HB 31](#) proposes a constitutional amendment that would make school board races partisan. [HB 31](#) has one committee stop left. Its Senate companion, [SB 94](#), will be heard in the Ethics and Elections Committee on Tuesday, March 14. It will then have two more committee stops.
  - [HB 477](#) would impose eight-year term limits on school board members. Having cleared its final committee this week, [HB 477](#) is now ready to be heard by the entire House. Its Senate companion, [SB 1110](#), has three committee assignments and has yet to be placed on the agenda in its first committee.
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## On the Agenda for Next Week

- [HB 999](#) will be heard in the [House Postsecondary Education Committee](#), 3:30 p.m. Monday, March 13. [Click here to email the committee members](#) and ask them to oppose the bill.
- [SB 94](#) will be heard in the Ethics and Elections Committee, 4 p.m. Tuesday, March 14.

Notice of committee meeting agendas must be provided with three days' notice in the Senate and two days' notice in the House. So, as of the writing of this Frontline, we only have a limited glance at what bills will be heard next week. [Check our website](#) throughout the week for the most updated information.

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### Thanks!

Finally, we want to give a shout out to all the locals that sent members up to Tallahassee this week: Association of Bay County Educators, Bay ESPA, Clay CEA, Escambia EA, Hardee CEA, Hillsborough CTA, Jackson CEA, Jackson ESPA, Leon CTA, Leon ESPA, Levy CEA, Marion EA, Nassau TA, Okaloosa CEA, Okaloosa ESPA, Palm Beach CTA, St Johns EA, United Faculty of Florida-FSU Chapter, United Teachers of Suwannee, Wakulla CTA, and Walton CEA.

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