

Florida Education Association

Frontline Report

2024 Legislative Session

February 2, 2024

A Brief Recap of the Week

As we approach the midway point of session, some bills are moving quickly while others remain stuck in committee. Over these next five weeks, FEA, our locals and our members will continue to advocate for better and fairer pay, improved working conditions and the respect that all educators deserve.

Read on to learn more about

- retirement security,
- the latest on “deregulation,”
- rolling back child labor protections
- this year’s union bill, and
- another attack on the teaching of accurate history

All of us deserve retirement security

HB 151 fulfills one of [FEA’s legislative priorities](#) by restoring the annual 3% cost-of-living adjustment to the Florida Retirement System’s pension plan. It passed its second committee this week on a [unanimous vote](#).

The Senate companion, SB 242, has yet to be heard in its first committee setting up a repeat of what happened last year when the bill passed the House but did not make it across the line in the Senate.

We’ll continue working to get the bill across the finish line in both chambers as we know that every educator deserves to retire with dignity.

Tell legislators to prioritize salary flexibility

Over the past few weeks, we've written extensively about the "deregulation" bills in the House and Senate. The two chambers remain very far apart on their deregulation packages. The Senate's package contains some provisions that would immediately benefit students and educators including:

- Reducing some punitive consequences for high-stakes tests,
- Allowing instructional staff to earn multi-year contracts, and
- Eliminating some, but not all, of the 20+ laws regarding teacher pay that have caused wage compression.

The House package does not contain any of those provisions. Instead of being centered around the needs of students and educators, it focuses primarily on reducing administrative tasks and reporting at the district level.

Of course, before the bills can become law, they must come into alignment. As the leaders in the House and Senate are negotiating on what the final version of the bill will look like, it is essential they hear from educators like you.

We have two asks of you:

1. [Use this link to email your senator](#) and ask them to tell Senate President Kathleen Passidomo to hold firm on the Senate's position regarding salary flexibility
2. [Use this link to email your representative](#) and ask them to tell Speaker of the House Paul Renner to accept the Senate's position on salary flexibility.

HB 49 passes the House

Many of us had our first job as teenagers, so we know firsthand the benefits that can come from working at a young age. As educators we also know the importance that any job our children have is a *part-time* job. We know our students shouldn't be working long into the night before going to school the next day, and we know they shouldn't be working for weeks on end without a day off. Currently, there are laws in place to make sure employers must follow those very common-sense protections so they cannot exploit child labor.

[House Bill 49](#) which passed along an [80-35 vote](#) on Thursday repeals those common sense provisions.

Its Senate companion, [SB 1596](#), has been heard in one committee and has two committee stops left. In its first Senate hearing earlier this week the bill's sponsor Sen. Danny Burgess (R-Zephyrhills) was quick to point out that the Senate's version of the bill is different from the House. It

would, for instance, keep the current hourly cap for sixteen and seventeen year-olds, meaning they would not be allowed to work full-time when school is in session.

While the Senate bill is marginally better than the House version, the solution to Florida's labor shortage cannot be weakening existing protections afforded to our children. We continue to oppose both bills and will let you know when opportunities arise for you oppose them as well.

Creating an enemies list

As you might remember, last year SB 256 required the Public Employees Relations Commission (PERC) to create a membership authorization form that is full of anti-union slogans and propaganda. The bill, however, did not have a consequence for employees or their unions if those forms were not filled out.

This year's version of the bill adds a requirement that the forms be filled out by 60% of eligible union members or the union risks decertification. We have always known this requirement was put in place to create yet another obstacle in the way of our local unions. By forcing them to spend their time and energy collecting 100+ reams of paperwork from their members, they are forced to spend less time assisting members and fighting for their economic security.

But in a committee hearing this week while presenting on [HB 1471](#), Rep. Dean Black made it clear there might be an even more nefarious intent. When asked why a union must both demonstrate they have collected dues from 60% of eligible members *and* collect a three-page state-created membership form, Rep. Black's answer was, "we need to know **who they are.**"

There is, of course, no legitimate state interest in knowing which public employees have made the choice to join their union. In fact, our country's history (the version they don't want children to know about) reveals to us many instances of our government making lists of groups they don't like for the simple sake of intimidation.

Leaders like Rep. Black will have you believe that "union" is a bad word in Florida. At FEA, we stand loud and proud with our union family because we know that the union tide lifts all. And regardless of what list we are placed on, we are Floridians and community leaders and mentors and neighbors and workers trying to make a living and provide for our families and loved one.

Whether you are a union member or not, whether you consider yourself a supporter of labor unions or not, **every** person in Florida should be concerned about intimidation tactics against public employees and their unions.

To Rep. Black we say, you don't have to look far to know who we are. We are the bus drivers who transport children, the cafeteria workers who feed them, the nurses who take care of them and the teachers who teach them. When children get home at the end of the school day and sit around the dinner table and tell their family about the adults who inspired them, motivated them and pushed

them to become more than they ever thought possible, they are talking about union members. We welcome Rep. Black to come get to know us and hope we can have a productive conversation on the real issues facing teachers, students and parents.

Constitution Shmonstitution

Tuesday afternoon a House committee passed [HB 1291](#) dealing with educator preparation programs. Before we go into detail on that bill, a little context and refresher of recent legislative history might be helpful.

Nearly two years ago, in April 2022, Gov. DeSantis signed the “Stop Woke” act into law. Among other things, this law limited classroom instruction on race in Florida’s public schools, colleges and universities. A few months later, a lawsuit was filed to challenge these provisions. Court cases like this often drag on for years and there is no telling when a final ruling will be issued.

Fortunately, the parts of the law impacting higher education cannot currently be implemented as they were blocked by a federal judge. In his [order blocking the law](#), Judge Mark Walker characterized the DeSantis’ administration argument as, “...the state of Florida says that to avoid indoctrination, the state of Florida can impose its own orthodoxy and can indoctrinate students to its preferred viewpoint.” Walker went on to say, “the First Amendment does not permit the State of Florida to muzzle its university professors, impose its own orthodoxy of viewpoints, and cast us all into the dark.”

Undeterred by the unconstitutionality of Stop Woke, Rep. John Snyder (R-Stuart) is again trying to limit what can be discussed in higher education. HB 1291 would prohibit teacher preparation programs from violating the Stop Woke Act. In practical terms, this means those studying to be teachers could learn that Florida’s schools remain largely racially segregated, but they might not be able to examine the root causes of why that is the case. Teacher candidates could be instructed that students of color routinely perform worse on standardized tests, but any explanation that their performance is caused by systemic issues would be forbidden.

Taken to its logical conclusion, this law mandates teacher preparations programs to either ignore racial disparities in standardized testing or to teach the pernicious, racist belief that Black and Brown students are themselves to blame for low test scores. HB 1291 would require teacher preparation programs to ignore the reality that politicians like Rep. Snyder have passed laws that disfavor students of color and have engaged in persistent underfunding of Florida’s schools, especially those attended predominantly by students of color. It seems that what Stop Woke is really about is stopping Florida’s residents from learning the truth about our state’s past and present politicians.

Thanks!

Members of our governance board (pictured below) were in Tallahassee this week where they not only participated in a governance board meeting but also attended a legislative reception at the FEA building, lobbied their legislators and advocated for children and public education.



How You Can Take Action Today

Visit the [FEA website](#) to learn more about session and sign up for FEA Action Alert texts by texting “**edactivist**” to 22394.

Questions? Call PPA at 850-224-2078.

If this email was forwarded to you, [click here to subscribe to the FEA Frontline](#) so you can receive these update regularly.

Unsubscribe - [Unsubscribe Preferences](#)