

Florida Education Association

Frontline Report

2024 Legislative Session

February 23, 2024

A Brief Recap of the Week

There's a mere fortnight left in session and budget conferees still have not been named. For session to end on time (as we all hope it will) the budget must be finalized by Tuesday, March 5. So, what were the legislators working on this week instead of the budget?

Read on to learn more about how legislators tackled

- New and innovative ways to add more to your plate,
- Professional mental healthcare for some, random volunteer counselors for others, and
- Deregulation bills coming in for a landing.

Silence isn't golden

With just two weeks left in session, nearly 100 bills have been passed off the Senate floor. One of those bills is SB 1746 which passed the Senate on a [22-15](#) vote Thursday morning. There are some good things about this bill- it will remove a costly and burdensome audit requirement. But you will recall, SB 1746 will create additional burdens for educators and other public employee union members by requiring them to fill out a union membership form designed by Tallahassee bureaucrats.

An amendment that would have stripped this requirement failed along a [largely party-line vote](#). We thank Sens. Bradley, Garcia, Gruters, Rodriguez and Simon for ultimately joining with all the democrats to support the amendment.

What makes this bill unique is that aside from the bill sponsor, Sen. Blaise Ingogila (R-Spring Hill), not a single person has publicly spoken in favor of this bill this legislative session. In both of the bill's committee stops there were people who spoke against the bill and those who spoke to provide information on the bill, but nobody spoke in favor of it.

In the bill's first committee stop when Sens. Avila, Albritton, Rodriguez and Wright [voted in favor of the bill](#), they were silent as to their reasons for putting more work on your plate.

In the bill's second committee stop when Sens. Baxley, Boyd, Brouder, Broxson, Burton, DiCeglie, Hooper, Hutson, Mayfield, Perry, Rodriguez and Simon [voted for it](#), none of them felt compelled to explain why they support union members being compelled to fill out a state-created membership form. They were all silent.

When the bill was heard on the floor, there were impassioned speeches against the bill but silence from those voted for it. Not even the bill sponsor spoke in favor of the bill; he waived his opportunity to do so. It is, of course, unusual for a bill to go through all its committees and a floor vote without anyone vocally supporting the bill.

On one hand it's understandable why the senators didn't vocally support this bill. They know it's bad policy. They know it's being pushed by special interest groups who are not representative of your communities. They know it's politically risky to publicly attack labor unions when unions enjoy favorability ratings that are near all-time highs.

On the other hand, it's quite shameful these senators know all this information and choose to silently support the bill hoping their constituents simply won't notice. While we thank the leaders who stood with us, two weeks from now session will be over, legislators will be back in their districts and they will be campaigning for their next election. They will either feel pressure back home to explain why they supported the wishes of their corporate donors over the wishes of their constituents or they'll be allowed to continue their silence on these issues. We want everyone reading this to ask yourselves- are you ok with your leaders putting your jobs, your dignity, your students and your communities last? It is up to each of us to hold legislators accountable.

To learn more about how you get involved and hold elected officials accountable, reach out to your local union president.

The House companion, HB 1471, passed its final committee this week and during the committee meeting, FEA members from around the state were anything but silent! We appreciate all the educators who came to Tallahassee this week and spoke out on this burdensome bill. As with the Senate, nobody spoke in favor of the bill. Not surprisingly, HB 1471 [passed along party lines](#). Having passed its last committee stop, it is now ready for the floor.

The latest on deregulation

On just the second day of session, the Senate passed three bills: [SB 7000](#), [7002](#) and [7004](#). The House has placed two of the three bills, SB 7002 and 7004, on the calendar for Tuesday, Feb. 27. While SB 7002 focuses on finance and administrative deregulations for school districts, SB 7004 tackles Florida's system of assessment and accountability. Currently, the bill reduces some high-

stakes testing consequences for students and prohibits VAM from being used as the sole determinant for recruiting instructional personnel. We'll be watching closely to see what amendments, if any, are filed and how the House might change this bill from what the Senate passed.

Notably, the House has not added SB 7000 to its calendar. This is the bill that would reduce some of the 20+ laws that regulate how educators are paid and would help with teacher retention by once again allowing teachers to earn multi-year contracts.

We'll of course have an update on these bills in next week's Frontline, but to find out the latest information right away, [join us for Power Hour](#) Tuesday, Feb. 27 starting at 5:30 p.m. EST.

Mental Health Funding? Will untrained volunteers work instead?

Florida has a robust economy and we have the resources to ensure every child has timely access to trained and certified counselors and mental health professionals inside and outside of school. That is what parents want, and it is what children deserve.

HB 931 will allow anyone who can pass a background check to receive the title of school chaplain and be empowered to offer "support, services, and programs to students." The bill's sponsor, Rep. Stan McClain (R-Ocala) as well as those who supported the bill were clear about their intentions. They expect these untrained volunteer "chaplains" to fill the gap in Florida's mental health system.

It should concern us all that instead of properly funding mental health care, nurses and counselors in schools, and ensuring all students have access to the resources they need to feel safe and whole, our state's leaders decide that untrained "chaplains" can be the answer.

Parents and students need more. They need real answers, real solutions. Once again, leaders in Florida are telling us they don't care to fix the real issues that impact our public schools and our communities. Parents and children are being presented with the worst of all options instead of what is best for them, from a state that is more than capable of providing them with more.

We'll know soon if the Senate follows suit. SB 1044 will be heard in its final committee on Monday, Feb. 26. We'll keep you updated on this bill. Should this bill become law, each school district will decide whether to allow unvetted and untrained individuals to support students. It will be vital to monitor what is happening in your school district and, should these bills become law and become implemented in your districts, to fight for strict guidelines and protocols on who can serve in this role. Ask yourselves- what do your children or your students deserve? Stay tuned for more.

Thanks!

We want to offer our sincerest thanks to members from each of the following local unions who came up to Tallahassee this week to meet with legislators and testify in committee: Brevard Federation of Teachers, Escambia Education Association, Palm Beach County Classroom Teachers Association, United Faculty of Miami-Dade College, Polk Education Association-Retired, St. Johns Education Association, Orange County Classroom Teachers Association, Marion Education Association, Levy County Education Association, Volusia United Educators, Nassau Teachers Association, Putnam Federation of Teachers and Okaloosa Education Staff Professionals.

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.

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