Palm Beach County State Legislative Update

Session Week 1 — Week of January 12

Palm Beach County Day 2026

Over 350 Palm Beach County elected officials, business leaders, and community advocates "Chartered a Course" to Tallahassee to celebrate Palm Beach County Day 2026. County commissioners, administration, and staff attended 40+ meetings with legislative leadership, agency heads, and members to promote our county's legislative priorities this year. Among the issues discussed were affordable housing, economic development, rural communities, infrastructure, and Palm Beach County's local funding requests.

UPDATES FROM THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH



Governor DeSantis Delivers Final State of the State Address

In his final State of the State address on opening day of the 2026 Legislative Session, Governor Ron DeSantis defended his administration's record and urged lawmakers to advance conservative priorities, declaring Florida the "Free State of Florida." He pointed to what he described as significant results in economic management, cultural policy, and government accountability, calling on the Legislature to swiftly pass bills on immigration enforcement, eliminating diversity, equity, and inclusion programs, expanding gun rights, and supporting rural communities.

DeSantis highlighted the Hope Florida initiative, crediting First Lady Casey DeSantis with helping Floridians transition off public assistance and saving the state an estimated $130 million annually. He argued the program reflects a "hand up, not a handout" approach, while legislative Democrats criticized the charity and questioned its political ties following the speech.

On tax policy, the Governor adopted a more collaborative tone, encouraging lawmakers to work together to place a property tax relief measure on the ballot and allow voters to decide on what he called transformational relief for taxpayers.

The Governor also addressed emerging challenges related to artificial intelligence, calling for oversight while warning that rapid adoption could disrupt the economy, strain energy resources, and create social harms, particularly for young people.

DeSantis cited strict immigration enforcement, noting the state has assisted in the deportation of more than 20,000 undocumented immigrants. He also emphasized fiscal responsibility, pointing to a tripled rainy-day fund, major debt reduction, and more than $1 billion saved through accelerated debt repayment.

Highlighting education and cultural issues, DeSantis said Florida has expanded school choice and resisted what he described as ideological influence in classrooms, reaffirming parental rights and traditional policies in athletics and education.

The Governor pointed to Everglades restoration as a defining environmental achievement of his administration, calling it the largest restoration effort in the nation and a sign of long-term ecological recovery.

Closing with references to the nation's upcoming 250th anniversary, DeSantis framed his tenure as one rooted in preserving liberty and decisive governance, urging lawmakers to continue advancing policies that reflect Florida's values and national leadership.

UPDATES FROM THE LEGISLATURE

The Florida House and Senate began their annual 60-day legislative session on Tuesday, January 13. Included below are a few highlights of what happened this week in Tallahassee.

Senate President Ben Albritton Gives Opening Day Remarks

Florida Senate President Ben Albritton (R-Wauchula) opened the 2026 Legislative Session by gaveling in the chamber and outlining priorities centered on revitalizing rural Florida, improving affordability, and maintaining fiscal discipline, while also offering a tribute to Governor Ron DeSantis during his final legislative session as governor. Albritton described DeSantis' tenure as "unpredictable, surprising, energetic, trailblazing," and acknowledged the tension of the prior session, noting that despite challenges, "we completed our mission."

Emphasizing his leadership style, Albritton told lawmakers he is "not king of the Senate," stressing collaboration and communication as guiding principles rooted in his faith. He reflected on last year's unusually contentious session, marked by legislative pushback against the governor and protracted budget negotiations, underscoring the Senate's independence and responsibility as a deliberative body.

A central theme of Albritton's remarks was his renewed push for a "Rural Renaissance." Entering his final year as Senate president, he highlighted support from the Trump administration and discussions with U.S. Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins to elevate Florida's rural policy framework as a national model. Revived legislation includes nearly $218 million in investments for rural roads, housing, education, healthcare, and economic development. He also reaffirmed strong support for Florida agriculture and citrus, building on the "Make Citrus Great Again" and "Farmers Feeding Florida" initiatives, and pledged continued investment in research and innovation to restore the industry.

Affordability was identified as the Senate's other major priority. Albritton acknowledged inflation, housing costs, insurance pressures, and taxes as top concerns for Floridians, while cautioning that state lawmakers have limited ability to control prices driven by national and global forces. He praised federal tax cuts as providing the most direct relief and committed to maintaining Florida's low-tax structure.

Property taxes emerged as a key issue for the session, with Albritton expressing support for giving voters the opportunity to approve meaningful property tax relief while balancing the need to fund essential services. He concluded by reiterating his commitment to passing a balanced budget that restrains spending, reduces debt, cuts taxes, and saves for the future—calling fiscal responsibility the most effective way to keep Florida on the right track.

To read a full transcript of President Albritton's remarks, click HERE.

House Speaker Daniel Perez Gives Opening Day Remarks

House Speaker Daniel Perez (R-Miami) opened his remarks by reflecting on the House's journey since November 2024, emphasizing independence, resilience, and unity. He described a term shaped by unexpected challenges, hard-fought victories, and difficult setbacks, noting that members found their collective voice, adapted when necessary, and stood firm on core principles.

Perez stressed that effective government is driven by the character, humility, and actions of those who serve, not slogans or simple answers. Acknowledging that Florida faces complex challenges, he urged lawmakers to confront them with courage, reminding members that "difficult doesn't mean impossible and hard isn't an excuse for cowardice."

Looking ahead to the session, Perez outlined major issues before the House, including affordability, insurance, taxes, the economy, prescription drug costs, public benefits, infrastructure, and maintaining Florida's leadership in innovation and growth. He emphasized the House's constitutional duty to conduct the people's business with energy, creativity, and openness, and pledged to work with anyone willing to put Florida first.

Perez closed on a reflective and unifying note, saying the outcome of the session is uncertain but the shared journey matters most. He highlighted the House's culture of collective responsibility—focused on "we," not "I"—and reaffirmed his belief that the Legislature's work matters and that the House is always stronger together.

To read a full transcript of Speaker Perez's remarks, click HERE.

HB 4033 – Palm Beach County

The House Intergovernmental Affairs Committee passed HB 4033 this week related to Palm Beach County. The local bill revises definitions of family day care homes & large family child care homes to specify maximum number of children allowed to receive care in such homes in the county. The local bill has one more committee of reference in the House before it heads to the Floor.

Senate Community on Community Affairs

The Senate Committee on Community Affairs advanced two significant land-use measures this week, approving proposals that address long-term growth and conservation planning as well as post-hurricane redevelopment policy.

The committee voted 7–1 to approve **SB 354**, sponsored by Sen. Stan McClain, which establishes a new framework for large-scale "Blue Ribbon" projects aimed at aligning growth, conservation, and infrastructure planning. The bill would apply to landowners controlling at least 10,000 contiguous acres and require the permanent conservation of at least 60% of the property, with development planned over a 50-year horizon and subject to local government approval. While supporters argued the measure promotes smart growth, limits sprawl, and incentivizes conservation without public funding, several environmental groups and local-government advocates raised concerns. Sen. Kathleen Passidomo cast the lone dissenting vote, calling the proposal overly broad but signaling a willingness to work with the sponsor to address issues as the bill moves forward. Two amendments adopted by the committee expanded the definition of conservation lands to include certain public-purpose uses and clarified standards for public easements.

The committee also unanimously approved **SB 840**, sponsored by Sen. Nick DiCeglie, which seeks to correct unintended consequences of 2025 legislation (SB 180) governing post-hurricane redevelopment. SB 180 was designed to prevent local governments from slowing rebuilding efforts but has been used to block unrelated comprehensive plan changes statewide, prompting litigation from cities and counties. SB 840 would narrow the geographic scope of post-storm land use restrictions from 100 miles to 50 miles from a hurricane's track and shorten the duration of certain SB 180 provisions tied to Hurricanes Debby, Helene, and Milton, setting an expiration date of June 30 instead of late 2027. The bill also limits restrictions to properties that were actually damaged by a hurricane and clarifies that local governments may continue essential planning activities, including work in areas of critical state concern and infrastructure projects related to water, sewer, stormwater, and flood protection. No opposition speakers appeared on SB 840, and the Florida Association of Counties signaled support. The measure now heads to the Senate Judiciary Committee.

SB 48 - Housing

The Senate Appropriations Committee on Transportation, Tourism, and Economic Development approved SB 48 this week, a measure related to accessory dwelling units (ADUs) and affordable housing. The bill, sponsored by Sen. Don Gaetz, R-Crestview, would require cities and counties to authorize ADUs by December 1, rather than leaving them optional under current law. SB 48 prohibits rentals of ADUs for less than one month to ensure units are preserved for long-term housing, particularly for workers in the service and hospitality industries. The bill also removes language allowing reusable tenant screening reports, which were used in other states to simplify applications, citing concerns over the unauthorized sharing and potential hacking of personal data. The measure has received support from the Florida Homebuilders Association, James Madison Institute, Florida Realtors, and the Florida Chamber of Commerce. Several Florida cities, including Gainesville, Tampa, Orlando, and St. Petersburg, already allow ADUs. SB 48 now moves to the Senate Rules Committee, while the House companion bill, HB 313, has two more committee stops before reaching the floor.

SB 250 – Rural Communities

The Florida Senate passed SB 250 this week, sponsored by Sen. Corey Simon, aimed at supporting rural communities. The bill increases funding opportunities for roads, housing, education, health care, and business in counties designated as fiscally constrained. It raises the threshold for fiscally constrained status from $5 million to $10 million in property tax revenue per 1 mil. SB 250 would create the Office of Rural Prosperity within the Department of Commerce to help local governments plan and connect to state and federal resources. The bill provides $1 million in annual block grants to counties with declining populations until they achieve three consecutive years of growth. It also establishes a student loan repayment program for rural teachers, offering $15,000 over five years. Amendments removed $25 million for a Rural Access to Primary and Preventive Care Grant Program and eliminated the $5 million Stroke, Cardiac, and Obstetric Response and Education (SCORE) Grant Program. Adjustments were also made to Medicaid reimbursement for small rural critical care hospitals, ensuring state and federal funds are allocated efficiently. SB 250 now heads to the House for consideration.

To read a full overview of the provisions of the Rural Renaissance package, click HERE.

HB 133 – Minimum Age for Firearm Purchase or Transfer

The Florida House voted Thursday to lower the age to buy guns from 21 to 18 under HB 133, sponsored by Rep. Tyler Sirois. The measure mainly affects rifles, as federal law bars licensed dealers from selling handguns to anyone under 21, though it would allow private handgun sales to 18- to 21-year-olds. Supporters argued the bill restores constitutional rights for legal adults, while opponents cited

research linking younger age to higher rates of impulsive gun violence. Democrats unsuccessfully sought amendments to maintain the current age or impose a waiting period. The bill passed the House 74-37 and now heads to the Senate, where its prospects remain uncertain.

HB 145 – Suits Against the Government

The Florida House approved HB 145 this week, sponsored by Rep. Fiona McFarland, to raise the amount people can recover in lawsuits against cities, counties, and other government entities. The bill would increase sovereign immunity caps from $200,000 per person and $300,000 per incident to $500,000 per person and $1 million per incident beginning in 2026, with a second increase in 2031 to $600,000 per person and $1.2 million per incident. HB 145 would allow local governments to settle claims above the caps without legislative approval, streamline the claims process, align the statute of limitations for government negligence claims with private parties, and prevent insurers from withholding payment until a claims bill passes. The measure aims to reduce disparities between victims harmed by private actors and those injured by government negligence. The legislation now heads to the Senate, where its future remains uncertain. Its companion bill, SB 1366, was filed by Sen. Jason Brodeur on Jan. 7.

HB 111 - Anti Semitism Taskforce

The House Government Operations Subcommittee gave unanimous approval this week to HB 111, sponsored by Rep. Mike Gottlieb, to create an Antisemitism Task Force in Florida. The bill responds to a rise in hate crimes against Jewish residents, with Gottlieb noting more than 9,000 antisemitic incidents in the U.S. in 2024 alone.

The 18-member panel would operate under the Florida Office of Civil Rights, which would provide administrative support. Members would be appointed by the Legislature, Attorney General's Office, law enforcement, and other organizations, serving two-year terms. The Task Force would monitor antisemitic acts, advise on potential changes to hate crime laws, and automatically disband Oct. 1, 2029, unless extended by lawmakers.

HB 111 is next set for consideration by the House State Affairs Committee. Its companion bill, SB 1072, is sponsored by Sen. Alexis Calatayud in the Senate.