Palm Beach County State Legislative Update

Committee Meetings — Week of December 8



Governor DeSantis Announces the Floridians First 2026-2027 Budget

On December 10, 2025, Governor Ron DeSantis announced his budget proposal for Fiscal Year (FY) 2026–27. The proposed Floridians First Budget totals $117.4 billion, including $16.75 billion in reserves and $250 million towards debt reduction.

The proposed spending plan for the state's 2026-27 fiscal year would increase teacher and state law enforcement pay and set aside some money for small counties that might have trouble meeting budget needs if voters agree on proposed statewide property tax cuts next year. The proposal would come in about $2.2 billion more than the current year budget.

"This budget is entitled Floridians First because that is the focus of it," the governor said. "It is putting our people first and making sure we are good stewards but also making sure the needs that we have are being addressed."

In education spending, the governor is recommending boosting per student spending in K-12 schools by nearly $300 per student increasing teacher pay by about $201 million, though the state's teachers' union say it doesn't do enough in the current high cost of living economy. DeSantis also wants lawmakers to bolster spending on the state's prison system and give law enforcement officers a 5% raise. The plan includes a 2% across the board raise for other state workers.

DeSantis said he's proposing putting aside $300 million to "completely, 100% reimburse" the 32 counties in the state that are considered "fiscally constrained," for the revenue that they'd forgo with a loss of property tax revenue. But, DeSantis also said that in the out years, those counties may have to find ways to replace the revenue on their own. "Eventually they're going to have to figure it out," he said. DeSantis is also asking lawmakers to set out $6 million for the state Commerce Department to protect military training along the Gulf coast from a federally proposed expansion of oil drilling.

Overall, the Governor's Budget Recommendations outline a "Floridians First" plan totaling $117 billion, including $17 billion in reserves. The proposal makes major investments in education, with $1.56 billion dedicated to teacher pay increases, $30.6 billion for K–12 schools, $1.7 billion for early learning, $2 billion for the state college system, and $4 billion for the state university system. It also emphasizes infrastructure and public safety through a $14 billion State Works program and significant pay increases for local law enforcement. Environmental priorities include beach renourishment, coastal protection, and continued Everglades restoration. On property taxes, the Governor underscored that property taxes are primarily a local responsibility and noted that meaningful statewide relief would require a 2026 ballot measure; however, the budget prioritizes support for residential, homesteaded Floridians and provides funding to fully reimburse any homestead property tax reductions for fiscally constrained counties.

To read the budget highlights, click here [t.e2ma.net].

To read the transmittal letter, click here [t.e2ma.net].

To read the budget one pager, click here [t.e2ma.net].

Governor DeSantis Awards $29.5M for Bay Cleanup, Reef Restoration

Gov. Ron DeSantis announced that $20 million in state grants will help clean Biscayne Bay, while another $9.5 million will support efforts to protect Florida's coral reefs. Speaking at a press conference in North Miami Beach, DeSantis highlighted eight Biscayne Bay projects receiving funding across South Beach, Homestead, Miami Beach, and other communities. "These projects include septic to sewer conversion, wastewater storage projects that will lead to improved water quality of Biscayne Bay. What we've already done has made a difference," DeSantis said. "People are very pleased with that, but we're not done."

At the same event, DeSantis detailed that $9.5 million will go toward the state's ongoing coral reef restoration efforts, with a long-term goal of restoring 25% of Florida's coral reef by 2050. "As the home of the continental U.S.'s only living barrier reef, we have worked very hard to protect this natural treasure," he said. The funding will support 11 projects at institutions including Mote Marine, Reef Renewal USA, the University of Miami, and Florida Atlantic University. "This will help both the academic and private partners that are doing research to establish, expand and maintain Florida's in-state coral propagation and grow-out facilities," DeSantis added.

Florida Department of Environmental Protection Secretary Alexis Lambert noted that the new grants bring the total awarded through the Biscayne Bay Water Quality Improvement Grant Program to $100 million. "With continued support from Gov. DeSantis and the Legislature, we will keep making real measurable progress for Florida's coastal water," Lambert said. She emphasized the strong economic ties between the environment and South Florida's economy. "Few places in Florida show the connection between our environment and our economy more clearly than this one. The Bay supports millions of Floridians, including one of the busiest cruise ports in the world, and it plays a vital role in the health of Florida's coral reef."



Speaker Perez Unveils Sweeping Health Care Overhaul Tied to Trump-Era Reforms

On December 9, 2025, Florida House Speaker Daniel Perez announced a sweeping healthcare reform package titled *Florida's New Frontier in Healthcare*, which will be taken up during the upcoming Legislative Session. The initiative is designed to modernize Florida's healthcare system, strengthen the workforce, expand patient access, reduce regulatory burdens, and lower costs for families, all while implementing and advancing President Trump's federal healthcare reforms at the state level. Speaker Perez emphasized that Florida is moving decisively to align state policy with the President's vision by cutting red tape, empowering providers, prioritizing patients, and ensuring taxpayer dollars are spent responsibly.

The reform package is anchored by two major bills. The first, the Big Beautiful Healthcare Frontier Act sponsored by Representative Redondo, serves as the foundation of the state's healthcare overhaul. It aligns Florida's Medicaid, CHIP, and SNAP policies with new federal standards by limiting eligibility for certain illegal immigrants, reducing retroactive coverage periods to two months, codifying federal prohibitions on paying restricted entities with Medicaid funds, expanding SNAP work requirements for able-bodied adults up to age 64, and narrowing parental exemptions to those with children under 14.

The bill also strengthens program integrity by improving address verification, identifying deceased enrollees more quickly, and correcting SNAP payment errors by the end of 2026 to avoid federal penalties. Beyond federal alignment, the legislation advances a major package of healthcare modernization efforts. It removes remaining Certificate-of-Need requirements for nursing homes, hospice services, and intermediate care facilities, expands Florida's participation in interstate licensure compacts for physician assistants and EMS professionals, authorizes independent practice authority for all five advanced nursing specialties, lifts supervisory caps on physician assistants to increase patient capacity, broadens the scope of practice for dental hygienists, and enhances patient transparency protections by requiring proactive notice of out-of-network referrals and ensuring that cost-effective patient payments are applied toward deductibles.

Representative Redondo stated that these changes reflect President Trump's emphasis on reducing bureaucratic barriers, strengthening the healthcare workforce, and giving patients more freedom to choose how they receive care.

The second major bill, the Prescription Reduction Incentives and Competition Enhancement (PRICE) Act sponsored by Representative Kincart Jonsson, focuses on prescription drug affordability, market transparency, and fairness in pharmaceutical pricing. It establishes a most-favored-nation pricing model under which drug manufacturers must provide Florida with international pricing data as a condition of doing business in the state. The Agency for Health Care Administration will determine and publish the lowest price for each drug paid by comparable free-market countries, excluding prices from single-payer systems, and Florida insurers, Medicaid plans, and pharmacies will be barred from paying above that benchmark. Savings generated by these pricing limits must be used to reduce premiums and patient cost-sharing.

The bill requires annual reporting from insurers, AHCA, and the Office of Insurance Regulation to measure price changes and patient savings. In addition, the PRICE Act increases oversight of Pharmacy Benefit Managers by prohibiting them from forcing pharmacies to

dispense medications at a loss, restricting them from requiring use of PBM-affiliated manufacturers when cheaper generics or biosimilars are available, mandating equal reimbursement rates for out-of-network pharmacies, and directing OIR to adopt formal PBM contracting rules. The bill also creates “frozen formularies” to prevent insurers and PBMs from making mid-year changes such as removing drugs, increasing out-of-pocket costs, or reclassifying medication tiers, provided that manufacturers maintain stable pricing throughout the plan year. Representative Kincart Jonsson noted that these protections restore fairness and consistency for patients and help reduce sudden price spikes at the pharmacy counter.

Together, the Big Beautiful Healthcare Frontier Act and the PRICE Act form the core of Florida’s new healthcare frontier. The combined reforms reflect a conservative, market-driven strategy that increases competition, enhances the provider workforce, protects consumers, lowers costs, and strengthens the integrity of state programs. Speaker Perez concluded that by building on the President’s leadership and taking decisive action at the state level, Florida is once again demonstrating its ability to lead the nation with practical, results-driven solutions that expand access, improve affordability, and create a healthcare system that better serves Florida’s families.

Florida Legislature Hosts Committee Meetings

This past committee week, the Florida Legislature convened for a series of committee meetings, focusing on presentations from cabinet members, state agency leaders, staff, and professional associations. The Florida House also designated the week of December 8 as “Artificial Intelligence Week” in the Capitol. As several pieces of legislation were considered, lawmakers gathered valuable insights on a variety of pressing issues. Below is a summary of the key topics discussed.

House Insurance & Banking Subcommittee

On December, 9, 2025, the House Insurance & Banking Subcommittee unanimously advanced legislation (HB 527) that would require a "qualified human professional" to review insurance claims decisions rather than allowing companies to rely solely on artificial intelligence algorithms.

Under the measure, sponsored by Republican Rep. Hillary Cassel, insurance carriers in Florida could use an algorithm, artificial intelligence system, or machine learning system to assist in processing claims, including generating recommendations to approve or deny a claim or a portion of a claim, but the decision couldn't be solely based on the AI and would have to be signed off on by a person. The bill defines a "qualified human professional" as someone who under Florida insurance laws has the authority to adjust or deny a claim. The measure also would apply the same rules to health maintenance organizations' decisions on paying claims.

“If you're going to deny ... or reduce coverage, you've got to have somebody take a look at it," Cassel told the House Insurance & Banking Subcommittee on Tuesday. "The tools can still be used but consumers are still protected." Cassel also emphasized that the measure doesn't create any new causes for people to file lawsuits, but instead relies on state insurance officials to enforce the requirements.

The measure now heads to the House Commerce Committee, its final stop before reaching the House floor. An identical Senate companion, SB 202, is awaiting its first committee hearing.

Senate Criminal Justice Committee

On December 9, 2025, the Senate Criminal Justice Committee met and considered SB 296, *Victims of Domestic Violence and Dating Violence*, sponsored by Senator Berman, also known as the “Helping Abuse Victims Escape Now (HAVEN) Act.” The bill advanced unanimously out of committee.

SB 296 creates section 741.317, F.S., establishing the HAVEN Coordinating Council within the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE). The FDLE is required to provide administrative and staff support for the council. The bill outlines definitions, membership requirements, council duties, and reporting obligations. It authorizes the Legislature to appropriate funds and permits the council to receive grants and donations. It also allows each county to establish a county-level HAVEN council to work in coordination with the statewide body. Among its responsibilities, the council must develop a dynamic website that allows users to discreetly contact or alert law enforcement, enabling officers to be dispatched to the user’s location. The bill also defines “dating violence” and permits victims of dating violence to participate in the Attorney General’s address confidentiality program. The HAVEN Coordinating Council is scheduled for repeal on October 2, 2029, unless reviewed and saved from repeal by the Legislature.

There were no member questions or debate and the Florida National Organization for Women and Alliance for Safety and Justice both waived in support.

Local governments would be encouraged to identify vulnerable coastal areas and implement projects using the Resilient Florida Grant Program, including $250,000 for a feasibility study, and to seek Workforce Development Capitalization Incentive Grant money for workforce training on relevant projects.

The measure would also streamline permitting for green and hybrid infrastructure, especially after storms. Garcia filed a similar measure (SB 50) in the 2025 session which passed the Senate but not the House. The 2025 bill established a study project at the University of South Florida's College of Marine Science, but SB 302 does not.

No House companion to this year's bill has been filed yet, but SB 302 is slated next for the Senate Appropriations Committee on Agriculture, Environment, and General Government.

House Budget Committee

Despite pushback from cities, counties, and school districts, a House panel on December 3, 2025, advanced a proposal to increase the amount government agencies must pay when people are injured due to negligence — a move supporters call overdue and opponents warn could strain local budgets. The House Budget Committee voted 22–2 to approve HB 145, which would overhaul the state's sovereign immunity laws put in place by the Legislature in the 1970s to shield public agencies from large lawsuit payouts.

Current limits, last amended in 2010, cap liability at $200,000 per person and $300,000 per incident unless lawmakers approve a special "claim" bill to exceed such limits. The measure, sponsored by Sarasota Republican Rep. Fiona McFarland, would increase the caps to $500,000 per person and $1 million per incident for cases beginning Oct. 1, 2026, and then to $600,000 per person and $1.2 million per incident starting Oct. 1, 2031. It would also allow local governments to settle certain claims beyond statutory limits without legislative approval, thereby eliminating the need for a claim bill in some instances.

McFarland said giving injured Floridians greater recourse is overdue. But critics, including the Florida Association of Counties, the Safety Net Hospital Alliance of Florida, the Florida League of Cities, and the Panhandle Area Educational Consortium, among others, warned that the changes would drive up insurance costs and trigger more litigation — especially as property tax cuts may potentially go before voters in 2026. GOP Reps. Patt Maney and Toby Overdorf cast the two opposing votes, and the legislation now heads to its third and final committee stop: the House Judiciary Committee.

While McFarland has pushed to raise the state's sovereign immunity caps for several years, a Senate companion to her newest proposal has not yet been filed ahead of the 2026 legislative session, which begins Jan. 13.

House Judiciary Committee

A measure (HB 133) that would lower the minimum age to buy rifles and other long guns from 21 to 18 is ready for a vote by the full Florida House following final committee approval in the chamber on December 2, 2025. The bill would reverse a bipartisan 2018 law that increased the age for gun purchases after the 2018 Parkland school shooting in Broward County. The bill, by Republican Rep. Tyler Sirois, was approved on a 13–7 vote in the House Judiciary Committee. Passage by the full chamber is likely, but whether the bill can get a hearing in the Senate is a major question. Similar bills to restore the lower age limit have passed previously in the House, but have failed to get a Senate hearing for several years running.

On Tuesday, Democratic Rep. Dan Daley noted that while several young people testified against the bill in committee, no 18-to-21-year-olds had come to lawmakers pleading to once again be able to buy rifles from gun dealers. Opponents also noted that the age restriction doesn't prevent parents or others from buying guns for people under 21. Dade City Republican Rep. Kevin Steele echoed a long-running argument among gun rights advocates, suggesting that passing more restrictive laws won't address mental health issues that he said are the primary driver of criminal gun violence.

The bill would lower the age to 18 for buying rifles and long guns from federally licensed gun dealers. While people under 21 would still be barred from buying handguns from licensed dealers under federal law, if Sirois' bill passes they would be able to purchase handguns from private sellers.

Senate Appropriations Committee

On Wednesday, December 10, 2025, the Senate Appropriations Committee unanimously advanced a sweeping "rural renaissance" bill designed to expand health care, education, transportation, and economic development in rural communities. The measure (SB 250), sponsored by Tallahassee Republican Sen. Corey Simon, is a top priority for Senate President Ben Albritton, R-Wauchula, and is now slated for a full floor vote during the first week of the 2026 regular legislative session next month. Lawmakers passed a similar bill in the Senate last year, but it fell apart and failed to pass in the House. Simon said that while the 2025 effort stalled, the "challenges of rural Floridians did not go away." He added that the goal now is to ensure "families can stay and thrive in communities they love" by strengthening local economies and improving essential services.

The wide-ranging proposal would create an Office of Rural Prosperity within the Department of Commerce, offer incentives to attract doctors and other health providers to underserved areas, and direct funding to help rural communities repair and rebuild roads. It would also require preference for certain land planning technical assistance grants to communities in rural areas, change the conditions for counties to be considered "fiscally constrained," and allocate millions in new funding for modernizing certain rural "farm-to-market" roads.

The roughly $218 million measure would also create a community block grant to provide open-ended funding for such communities, among other provisions. A similar, but not identical, House companion (HB 723) was filed on Wednesday by DeFuniak Springs Republican Rep. Shane Abbott.

House Ways & Means Committee

On December 10, 2025, the House Ways & Means Committee voted 10-5 on Wednesday to advance a proposed constitutional amendment to provide homeowners substantial property tax relief, brushing aside warnings from Democrats and local government advocates that it could trigger massive budget shortfalls across Florida communities. The joint resolution bill (HJR 209), sponsored by Coral Gables Republican Rep. Demi Busatta, is a top priority for House leadership and is now ready for a floor vote. The measure, which would require voter approval in the November general election, would create a new exemption shielding $200,000 of a homestead property's assessed value from non-school property taxes, provided the home is insured.

The panel also adopted an amendment to protect local firefighter and first responder funding — now grouped with law enforcement — from budget reductions if property tax revenues fall, requiring their budgets to remain at 2025-26 or 2026-27 levels, whichever is higher. Some Democrats questioned whether 911 dispatchers would be included, but Busatta said those definitions would be addressed later with implementing language if voters approve the amendment. Busatta argued the change is needed because some local governments "continue to fund their political wants on the backs of hardworking Floridians," pointing to a small rural county where the administrator earns $177,000 annually, though she did not name the county.

Critics, including local government groups, warned the amendment would devastate essential services. "We're the great state of Florida, we don't want to be Mississippi," said Jeff Scala of the Florida Association of Counties, urging lawmakers to reject what he described as a reckless financial blow. Florida League of Cities lobbyist Charles Chapman echoed that sentiment, arguing the loss of homestead taxable value would be catastrophic; for example, Port St. Lucie could see an 80% reduction, while DeLand could lose 85% of its homestead tax base. Opponents also argued the amendment would not save taxpayers money in the long run, predicting that local governments would be forced to sharply increase fees to maintain operations, including critical services.

Committee Chairman Rep. Wyman Duggan, R-Jacksonville, dismissed the doomsday scenarios, telling critics to make their case to voters instead of lawmakers. "You should be relishing the opportunity, rubbing your hands to get in front of your voters and make the case as to why your city should continue to exist," stated Duggan. "Our voters are capable of deciding how they want their property taxes to be assessed," Busatta added.

House Housing, Agriculture, and Tourism Subcommittee

On December 11, 2025, the House Housing, Agriculture, and Tourism Subcommittee advanced an amended version of HB 313, sponsored by Rep. Danny Nix, which would make it easier for homeowners to create accessory dwelling units (ADUs) on their primary property. The proposal, approved by a majority of the committee on Wednesday, would require local governments to adopt an ordinance to allow ADUs, also known as "granny flats" or "carriage houses," in single-family residential areas. Currently, local governments may permit such secondary living units, but this proposal would make approval mandatory statewide.

The measure also requires the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability (OPPAGA) to evaluate the use of mezzanine finance and the potential of tiny homes to address affordable housing needs. However, it would not allow landlords to accept reusable tenant screening reports after the panel voted to remove that language amid concerns about identity theft and fraud. A controversial second amendment removed a one-month minimum rental period, causing some members to question whether the measure would expand affordable housing opportunities or provide a revenue stream for owners who rent out to vacationers.

The bill has two more committee stops. A companion measure (SB 48) by Crestview Republican Sen. Don Gaetz was approved by the Senate Community Affairs Committee last month. Gaetz filed similar legislation last session, SB 184, which passed both the House and Senate but died when the two chambers could not reconcile a House amendment related to short-term rentals and other provisions in the final days.

House Judiciary Committee

On December 11, 2025, the House Judiciary Committee met and advanced HB 145: Sovereign Immunity, sponsored by Rep. Fiona McFarland, on a 12-2 vote. HB 145 has been reported favorably out of its third and final committee stop and now heads to the House Floor.

HB 145 would significantly raise Florida's sovereign immunity caps placed on lawsuits against state and local governments and revives an effort to update how much people can recover when they sue. The measure would increase the current limits of $200,000 per person and $300,000 per incident to $500,000 and $1 million beginning in 2026. The caps would rise again in 2031 to $600,000 per person and $1.2 million per incident.

The bill would also allow cities, counties, and other public agencies to settle claims above those limits without needing a separate act of the Legislature. It shortens the time to file notices of claim against government entities, reduces the statute of limitations for negligence cases to two years, and bars insurers from requiring a claims bill before paying benefits. Supporters say the updates modernize payout limits that have not changed in over a decade and streamline a process that forces victims to seek additional compensation through a claims bill.

"I'll remind you that approximately one-fourth of claims bills that are filed every year pass, and again these caps were last updated in 2010," McFarland said during Thursday's committee meeting. However, local governments and school districts have previously warned that higher caps could increase insurance costs and pressure local budgets, especially as state legislators aim to cut property taxes.

HB 145 now heads to the House floor for debate, but a Senate companion has not yet been filed ahead of the January 9 deadline. The 2025 session version of SB 145 passed in the House on a 103-11 vote in April but stalled in the Senate, where its upper-chamber companion, sponsored by St. Petersburg Republican Sen. Nick DiCeglie, died without a hearing. DiCeglie previously stated that he isn't refiling the bill for the 2026 session and does not know if another Senator will.

Palm Beach County Day 2026

Save the date for Palm Beach County Day 2025! Join us in Tallahassee on Tuesday, January 13, and Wednesday, January 14, to advocate for our community. Visit our website at www.pbcgov.com/pbcdays/.

