Palm Beach County State Legislative Update

Committee Meetings — Week of November 3



Gov. Ron DeSantis in Palm Beach County: Celebrates Continued Everglades Restoration Momentum and Breaks Ground on New Inflow Pump Station at Critical EAA Reservoir Project

Today, Governor Ron DeSantis attended the groundbreaking for the new inflow pump station at the critical EAA Reservoir Project. The EAA Reservoir, located south of Lake Okeechobee, will store over 78 billion gallons of water—larger than Manhattan—and deliver up to 470 billion gallons of clean water annually to the Everglades and Florida Bay. It also supports the Biscayne Aquifer, the primary source of drinking water for South Florida.

This ceremony marks the 80th milestone event since 2019, celebrating ribbon cuttings, groundbreakings, and major achievements across Everglades restoration projects under the leadership of Governor Ron DeSantis—the most in state history.

"Florida reached a historic agreement with the Trump Administration earlier this year to expedite and advance Everglades restoration," said Governor Ron DeSantis. "Today, I was pleased to announce a milestone in Everglades restoration made possible by our cooperation with the federal government. Florida is now breaking ground on the new EAA Inflow Pump Station, an essential component of the EAA Reservoir project. This is the second Everglades restoration project to commence since the agreement with the Army Corps of Engineers last summer, which has empowered Florida to step up our Everglades restoration efforts. Today's groundbreaking marks the 80th milestone event in Everglades restoration that has taken place since 2019, thanks to our leadership and commitment to getting this done."

"The EAA Reservoir is a critical component of Everglades restoration and Governor DeSantis has led the charge on getting this project done," said Department of Environmental Protection Secretary Alexis Lambert. "Restoring America's Everglades is one of the most ambitious environmental restoration projects ever undertaken and will restore the natural flow of clean water south to where it's needed most. With every project we are delivering real results on time, under budget and with strong returns for Florida's taxpayers."

The new inflow pump station will have nine pumps and will be one of the largest pump stations in the State of Florida. The pump station will have the capability to move approximately 3 billion gallons of water per day from Lake Okeechobee into the EAA Reservoir.

For decades, Florida's water system was altered to prevent flooding, but at the cost of cutting off the natural flow of water to the Everglades. The EAA Reservoir Project is designed to correct that—redirecting water south, restoring ecosystems, and significantly reducing harmful discharges to the Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie estuaries. Once complete, the EAA Reservoir will provide lasting benefits for Florida's coastal communities and unique natural environment.

Today's groundbreaking commemorates another major milestone since the new landmark agreement was signed in July 2025 between the State of Florida and the U.S. Department of the Army. This agreement supercharges Everglades restoration by accelerating the EAA Reservoir's construction timeline by five years—from 2034 to 2029. It also cuts federal red tape and redirects resources to fast-track critical restoration efforts. The State of Florida already held a groundbreaking for the Blue Shanty Flow Way in September 2025, a vital system that will deliver clean water south across Tamiami Trail and into Florida Bay.

Florida's leadership has already resulted in faster, cleaner, and more affordable restoration efforts. Since 2019:

- The C-44 reservoir is complete, the C-43 reservoir is complete, and the EAA Reservoir is being accelerated.
- Annual nutrient reduction totals have reached over 1.8 million pounds of nitrogen, and 770,000 pounds of phosphorus removed from Florida's waterways.
- South Florida's water storage capacity has tripled to 176 billion gallons.

Since taking office, Governor DeSantis has made restoring the Everglades and improving water quality a cornerstone of his administration. On his second day in office, he issued Executive Order 19-12, which committed $2.5 billion over four years for water quality and Everglades projects. That goal was exceeded in his first term, with $3.3 billion invested—more than the previous 12 years combined.

In his second term, Governor DeSantis continued this momentum. With $1.4 billion included in this year's FY 2025-26 Budget, the state has now committed $4.6 billion in the first three years of the term, putting Florida on pace to exceed his $3.5 billion second-term goal. Altogether, nearly $8 billion has been invested since 2019 in Everglades restoration and water quality.

Revenue Estimating Conference Meets to Review House Select Committee Property Tax Proposals

Governor Ron DeSantis and House Speaker Daniel Perez are advancing discussions on eight proposed property tax relief measures, with state fiscal analysts now examining their potential financial impact on Florida's local governments. Representatives from the Governor's Office, Senate, House, and Office of Economic & Demographic Research convened the first Revenue Impact Estimating Conference to establish a methodology for evaluating these proposals. While no fiscal estimates were finalized, analysts agreed to model most proposals under a "high impact" scenario, anticipating future property growth. Certain measures, such as senior tax exemptions, will be evaluated under a "medium impact" scenario due to more immediate calculability. Further meetings are scheduled to refine fiscal projections.

If approved by the Legislature, the proposed constitutional amendments would appear on the 2026 ballot for voter approval. The measures include: eliminating or phasing out non-school homestead property taxes (HJR 201, HJR 203); exempting seniors 65 and older from such taxes (HJR 205); providing a 25% homestead exemption on non-school taxes (HJR 207); granting an additional $100,000 exemption for insured homes (HJR 209); lifting the cap on "Save Our Homes" benefit portability (HJR 211); reducing the rate of assessed value growth for homestead and non-homestead properties (HJR 213); and enacting statutory changes related to millage rate increases and benefit transfers for married couples (HB 215). Speaker Perez noted that the final decision will rest with voters and emphasized that none of the proposals would affect school tax revenues or law enforcement funding.

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. 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.

Senate Community Affairs Committee

On Tuesday, November 4, the Senate Community Affairs Committee convened and considered SB 48: Housing, sponsored by Senator Gaetz.

The Committee unanimously advanced SB 48, which contains several housing-related provisions, specifically regarding reusable tenant screening reports, accessory dwelling units, and density bonus incentives for land donation.

The bill authorizes, but does not require, a landlord to accept a "reusable tenant screening report" when determining whether to lease a residential property to a prospective tenant. A prospective tenant requests and pays for the report which is uploaded to a website that is then shared with a landlord. The availability of a reusable tenant screening report may streamline the application process for an applicant and avoid the cost of multiple background checks. The bill includes requirements for such reports, and protections related to fees for their use.

The bill also requires each county and municipality to enact an ordinance, by December 1, 2026, to allow accessory dwelling units (ADUs) in all single-family residential areas. Under current law, local governments are authorized, but not required, to enact such ordinance. The bill expressly allows local governments to regulate the permitting, construction, and use of ADUs, with specified exceptions.

The bill also allows certain land donated to a local government for affordable housing to be used to provide affordable housing to military families receiving the basic allowance for housing, and directs the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability to evaluate the efficacy of using mezzanine finance, or second position short-term debt, to stimulate the construction of owner-occupied affordable housing, and evaluate potential for tiny homes to meet affordable housing needs.

No amendments were offered, no member questions were raised, and public testimony from various organizations—including the Florida Association of Mortgage Professionals, AARP, the Florida Chamber of Commerce, Americans for Prosperity, and Florida Realtors—was supportive.

Civil Justice & Claims Subcommittee

On Wednesday, November 5, the Civil Justice & Claims Subcommittee, met and considered HB 145: Sovereign Immunity Caps, sponsored by State Representative Fiona McFarland.

The Subcommittee voted 17-1 to advance HB 145, which would raise Florida's limits on lawsuit awards against state and local governments advanced from its first committee with strong bipartisan support despite significant opposition from local governments. The proposal would increase the sovereign immunity cap from $200,000 to $500,000 per person and from $300,000 to $1 million per incident starting in 2026, with automatic increases after five years to $600,000 and $1.2 million, respectively. The bill also permits government entities to settle claims above those limits without legislative approval and aligns the statute of limitations for negligence claims against government entities with that for private parties.

McFarland argued the measure modernizes outdated limits and ensures fairness for citizens harmed by government actions, describing it as a "responsible update to a centuries-old doctrine." The House Civil Justice and Claims Subcommittee approved the bill 16–1. Supporters, including Rep. Dean Black, said it restores justice to victims burdened by excessive costs. Opponents, including the Florida League of Cities, Small County Coalition, and school district representatives, warned it could significantly raise insurance premiums, strain local budgets, and force cuts to public services amid pending property tax reductions. McFarland countered that similar objections have delayed necessary reform for years, asserting that "there will never be a perfect time" to address the issue. The bill now moves to the House Budget Committee for further review.

House Criminal Justice Subcommittee

On Wednesday, November 5, the House Criminal Justice Subcommittee convened and considered HB 17 – Criminal Offenses Against Law Enforcement Officers and Other Personnel, HB 45 – Sexual Offenders and Sexual Predators, and HB 199 – Veterans Affairs.

HB 17: Criminal Offenses Against Law Enforcement Officers and Other Personnel, sponsored by State Representative Jessica Baker, advanced unanimously out of the subcommittee and amends statutes related to resisting or committing violence against a law enforcement officer to require that the officer be engaged in the performance of his or her official duties, rather than engaged in the lawful performance or execution of a legal duty. As it relates to the prohibition on using or threatening to use force to resist an arrest, the bill defines "acting in good faith" and repeals a provision which specifies a law enforcement officer is not justified in using force if an arrest or execution of a legal duty is unlawful and known by the officer to be unlawful. Additionally, the bill adds manslaughter of a law enforcement officer to the list of offenses for which a court must sentence a convicted defendant to life imprisonment without eligibility for release and increases the ranking for the offense of battery on a law enforcement officer or other specified personnel on the offense severity ranking chart of the Criminal Punishment Code.

HB 45: Sexual Offenders and Sexual Predators, sponsored by Representative Rachel Plakon, advanced on a 11-5 vote and revises several provisions related to persons convicted of committing specified sexual offenses after July 1, 2026, including:

- Prohibiting a person who is convicted of specified sexual offenses in which the victim was under 16 years of age from residing within 1,000 feet of a public swimming pool or public bathing place.
- Prohibiting a person who is on probation, community control, or conditional release for committing a specified sexual offense in which the victim was under 18 from:
- Living within 1,000 feet of a public swimming pool or public bathing place;
- Working or volunteering at a public swimming pool or public bathing place; or
- Visiting a public swimming pool or public bathing place without prior approval.

The bill prohibits a person who was convicted of committing specified sexual offenses prior to July 1, 2026 and who is currently subject to residency restrictions, from residing within 1,000 feet of a public swimming pool or public bathing place if such person changes his or her place of residence on or after July 1, 2026. The bill also requires a state agency or governmental subdivision to conduct a search of a person's name or other identifying information against the registration information for sexual predators and sexual offenders on a national or state website prior to a person's employment at a public swimming pool or public bathing place.

HB 199: Veteran Affairs, sponsored by State Representative Pat Maney, advanced unanimously out of the Subcommittee and repeals the existing requirement for a defendant to apply to and be approved by the state attorney for the defendant to be eligible for admission into a veterans treatment court (VTC) program, and instead authorizes the court, in consultation with a multidisciplinary team, to make such a determination if certain requirements are met. The bill also authorizes a sentencing court to place a defendant into a post adjudicatory VTC program if the defendant's offense is a specified nonviolent felony and the defendant is a servicemember or veteran who is otherwise qualified to participate in a VTC program, and also grants jurisdiction to the post adjudicatory VTC to adjudicate any violation of probation or community control committed by such a defendant.

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!

