Palm Beach County State Legislative Update

Committee Meetings — Week of October 13

Florida House files sweeping property tax package



On Thursday, October 16, House Speaker Daniel Perez unveiled a suite of property tax measures, shaped by the chamber's Select Committee on Property Taxes, that he intends to advance "through the process" in Tallahassee.

This year, one of the most consistent policy discussions in Florida has centered on property taxes, an issue in which the Florida House has played an active role. In the previous legislative session, the House passed a proposal to use Tourist Development Tax revenue to permanently reduce property taxes and established the Select Committee on Property Taxes to continue developing long-term solutions. Building on that work, several Members have now filed House Joint Resolutions 201, 203, 205, 207, 209, 211, and 213, as well as House Bill 215. These measures, which stem from the committee's findings, are intended to move forward through the legislative process with the goal of giving Florida voters—not just lawmakers—the opportunity to decide the future of property taxation in the state. Rather than presenting one unified plan, the House intends to allow voters to choose some, all, or none of the proposals on the 2026 ballot, emphasizing faith in the public's ability to make these decisions directly.

Each proposal includes two key provisions: first, they prohibit affected government entities from reducing funding for law enforcement, and second, they exclude school property taxes, which account for about 46% of school funding, or roughly $21 billion. The Joint Resolutions will not include implementing legislation at this stage; the Legislature will craft that framework after voters decide which measures to approve.

The proposals fall into three categories: Categorical Eliminations, Additional Exemptions, and Reforms.

Under Categorical Eliminations, HJR 201 by Rep. Steele would eliminate non-school homestead property taxes entirely; HJR 203 by Rep. Miller would phase them out over ten years by adding a $100,000 exemption each year until complete elimination; and HJR 205 by Rep. Porras would exempt Florida residents aged 65 and older from paying non-school homestead property taxes.

In the Additional Exemptions category, HJR 207 by Rep. Abbott would create a new homestead exemption equal to 25% of the assessed home value for non-school property taxes, benefiting both current and first-time homeowners, while HJR 209 by Rep. Busatta would grant an additional $100,000 exemption to homeowners who maintain property insurance. thirds vote to raise millage rates and allowing newly married couples to combine their Save Our Homes benefits.

The Reforms include HJR 211 by Rep. Overdorf, which would remove the cap on portability, allowing homeowners to transfer their full accumulated Save Our Homes benefit to a new home regardless of its value, and HJR 213 by Rep. Griffitts, which would slow the growth of assessed property values by capping increases at 3% over three years for homestead properties (down from 3% annually) and 15% over three years for non-homestead properties (down from 10% annually). Finally, HB 215 by Rep. Albert proposes statutory changes such as requiring a two- Overall, the Florida House's property tax initiative seeks to provide meaningful tax relief while protecting funding for schools and law enforcement.

By placing multiple options on the 2026 ballot, the Legislature aims to give voters direct control over how the state's property tax system should evolve, setting the stage for future legislative action once the people's will is clear.

Gov. Ron DeSantis visits West Palm Beach: Highlights Budget Successes and Future Plans



Governor Ron DeSantis visited West Palm Beach on Wednesday, October 15, speaking at the Kravis Center to residents, students, and local officials. During his address, he reflected on his administration's six-year record, focusing on fiscal responsibility and environmental initiatives. He highlighted Florida's improved financial health, noting that the state has paid down half of its debt and tripled its rainy day fund. DeSantis also emphasized significant investments in Everglades restoration and infrastructure projects, many of which were completed ahead of schedule. Looking forward, he introduced a proposal for property tax relief aimed at full-time Florida homeowners, explaining that the plan is being developed with state lawmakers and could provide substantial financial benefits to residents.

Lt. Governor Collins announces FHP-DEA interception of more than $17 million in cocaine



On Wednesday, October 15, Lieutenant Governor Jay Collins announced a joint operation between the Florida Highway Patrol (FHP) and the DEA in West Palm Beach. On October 5, authorities stopped a semi-truck suspected of carrying narcotics from the Mexico-Texas border while it was traveling on the Florida Turnpike. During the search, troopers found a hidden compartment containing 173 kilograms of cocaine, valued at about $17.3 million. One of the truck's occupants had previously been deported. Officials credited the bust to strong local, state, and federal cooperation. Dave Kerner of the Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles stated that with the southern border now more secure, cartels are resorting to riskier large-scale smuggling operations that law enforcement can more easily track and dismantle. The suspects are now in federal custody, and no names have been released.

Jim Boyd Formally Designated as Next Senate President



Senate Republicans on Tuesday, October 14, officially named Senator Jim Boyd of Bradenton as the next President of the Florida Senate, setting him up to lead the chamber for his final four-year term after the 2026 elections.

During the designation ceremony at the Capitol, the 68-year-old small business owner, emphasized fiscal restraint, pro-growth policies, and responsible stewardship, pledging to "defend the taxpayer," promote economic opportunity, and protect Florida's natural resources. He also acknowledged major statewide challenges — rapid growth, strained infrastructure, and changing economic needs — calling for principled and pragmatic leadership.

Boyd's colleagues praised his consensus-building, integrity, and "servant's heart." Sen. Danny Burgess called him "the diamond standard," referencing Boyd's nickname, "Diamond Jim," while Sen. Jay Trumbull lauded his transparency and consistency.

A veteran lawmaker and insurance executive, Boyd currently serves as Senate Majority Leader and previously chaired the Banking and Insurance Committee, where he led property insurance reforms and efforts to reduce opioid deaths. His election continues a family legacy of legislative service stretching back to the 1940s.

Boyd will lead the Senate during the 2027 and 2028 Sessions, navigating issues like federal health policy changes, affordability concerns, and insurance market stability — challenges he pledged to face "with courage, respect, and dedication to serving the people of Florida."

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. While only one piece of legislation was considered, lawmakers gathered valuable insights on a variety of pressing issues. Below is a summary of the key topics discussed.

Civil Justice & Claims Subcommittee

On Wednesday, October 15, the Civil Justice & Claims Subcommittee, met and considered HB 6003 - Recovery of Damages for Medical Negligence Resulting in Death, sponsored by Rep. Dana Trabulsy and Rep. Johanna López.

The Subcommittee voted 16-2 to advance HB 6003, a bill that would repeal a 1990 law restricting certain wrongful death claims due to medical negligence. The current law bars families from suing for non-economic damages, such as grief or loss of companionship, if a parent or offspring is 25 or older, unmarried, and without children under 25—a restriction critics have dubbed "free kill." The bill, sponsored by Rep. Trabulsy and Rep. López, mirrors a 2025 measure that was vetoed by Gov. Ron DeSantis over concerns that unlimited payouts could incentivize "jackpot justice." HB 6003 does not include caps on damages, maintaining a central point of contention.

Supporters of the bill argue it is a matter of fairness and justice for families whose loved ones die due to medical negligence. They highlight cases in which the law prevented families from seeking legal recourse, sharing personal stories of egregious errors in hospitals. Organizations such as the Florida Medical Rights Association, the Florida Alliance for Retired Americans, and trial lawyers emphasize that caps on non-economic damages have been repeatedly struck down by courts and do not improve safety or reduce insurance costs.

Opponents, including medical and business groups, warn that repealing the caps could drive up malpractice payouts, raise insurance premiums, and reduce health care access, as some doctors might retire early or leave the state due to increased risk. Florida already faces some of the highest medical malpractice claims in the country, and several insurers have stopped writing coverage. Some lawmakers suggested including "reasonable limits" on payouts to balance access to justice with economic concerns. HB 6003 will next move to the House Judiciary Committee before reaching the full House floor, and no Senate companion has been filed yet, leaving uncertainty about the bill's final fate.

House Intergovernmental Affairs Subcommittee

On Wednesday, October 15, the House Intergovernmental Affairs Subcommittee convened to examine county commission governance and districting across Florida, with testimony from the Florida Association of Counties (FAC) and commissioners from Bay, Madison, Pinellas, Polk, and Bradford Counties. Virginia "Ginger" Delegal of FAC provided a detailed overview of the legal and constitutional framework governing county boards of commissioners, highlighting that counties are generally governed by five- or seven-member boards with staggered four-year terms, where districts must be contiguous and approximately equal in population. She explained that while the default system allows at-large, partisan elections without term limits, charter counties have significant flexibility to tailor governance structures, including nonpartisan elections, single-member or at-large districts, term limits, and customized board sizes to reflect local demographics, population density, growth patterns, and diversity. Delegal emphasized that the optimal districting model depends on a county's size, growth, geographic characteristics, and community needs, and that county governments must balance statutory requirements with local priorities.

Commissioner Robert Carroll of Bay County expressed support for at-large districting, noting that it best serves his county's tourism-driven and military-influenced community by fostering comprehensive, countywide representation. Commissioner Ronnie Moore of Madison County detailed the rural demographics and legal history of his county, noting that single-member districts were adopted following a Voting Rights Act lawsuit and that this structure provides localized representation while maintaining countywide collaboration. Commissioner Dave Eggers of Pinellas County described the county's hybrid charter system of district and at-large commissioners, emphasizing that it balances targeted local insights with broader countywide perspectives. Commissioner Becky Troutman of Polk County favored at-large elections for the accountability they provide, while Commissioner Carolyn Spooner of Bradford County supported single-member districts, highlighting their transparency and direct connection to constituents. Across all testimony, commissioners consistently urged that decisions regarding districting and governance remain at the local level.

Subcommittee members raised a variety of questions regarding mayoral roles, historical conflicts, and system changes. Chairman Jacques inquired whether mayors serve as chair, to which Ms. Delegal confirmed that in some counties, including Orange County, mayors hold that role. Commissioners noted both historical instances of infighting and structural safeguards that prevent self-serving behavior. Representatives also explored whether counties have considered changing their districting systems; commissioners generally indicated that no changes

had been pursued, though some counties have considered stronger mayor systems or charter revisions. Representative Johnson asked FAC about studies on the cost or equity of different districting models, and Ms. Delegal confirmed that no such studies exist. Representative Gerwig clarified that while charter counties conduct charter reviews, there is no state-mandated interval, and that mayoral powers vary by county.

Overall, the Subcommittee discussion highlighted the remarkable diversity of county governance structures in Florida and the widespread belief that local autonomy is paramount. Commissioners emphasized that effective governance must account for each county's demographic composition, geographic challenges, growth patterns, and cultural characteristics. Despite differing preferences for at-large, single-member, or hybrid systems, there was broad agreement that counties should have the authority to design their boards and districting systems to best meet the needs of their communities, with legislative intervention limited to statutory compliance rather than uniform mandates.

House Insurance and Banking Subcommittee

On Tuesday, October 7, the House Insurance & Banking Subcommittee convened and heard a presentation on the My Florida Safe Homes Program from Steven Fielder, Chief Business Officer at the Department of Financial Services.

Fielder provided a status update on the My Safe Florida Home program, prompting questions from members about its effectiveness in lowering home insurance premiums. Between 2022 and 2025, the program received over $800 million in funding and awarded grants for home hardening to 40,719 homeowners. Of those, 20,995 reported reduced premiums, 12,154 said their costs remained stable, and 5,520 reported increases.

Rep. Botana commented that the billion dollars in state funding had not significantly helped Floridians reduce insurance costs. Fielder responded that while the program's main goal was to lower rates, the improvements also helped many homeowners avoid policy nonrenewal. He noted that homeowners who did see reductions saved an average of $938 in 2024. As of October 8, the program has approved 4,216 grants under new rules prioritizing low - and moderate-income homeowners.

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!

