

Florida Education Association

Frontline Report

2022 Legislative Session

Week 2

January 21, 2022

The second week of session has come to an end. While a handful bills seem to be moving at the speed of light, most bills are moving at a snail's pace. We still have seven more weeks to go.

Individual Freedom From Discomfort?

Instead of focusing on issues that parents, students and educators care about, such as addressing the shortage of teachers and staff, the Senate Education Committee spent much of their meeting debating a bill that will serve only to drive even more dedicated, professional educators out of the profession.

SB 148, Individual Freedom by Sen. Manny Diaz (R-Hialeah), is an attempt to censor the accurate teaching of American history under the guise of preventing students from feeling uncomfortable about events in the past. As Sen. Shevrin Jones (D-Miami Gardens) said in committee, "Censoring what is happening inside our educational institutions is not the way we as a body should be moving ... we are much better than this."

Despite the strenuous objections of Jones and many concerned members of the public who spoke in opposition to SB 148, it passed on a **party line vote** and is now headed to the Rules Committee.

While the House did not take up their version of the “Individual Freedom” bill this week, they too engaged in the culture wars instead of focusing on issues to strengthen our schools like reducing standardized testing or ensuring stability by allowing teachers to have multi-year contracts.

The House Education and Employment Committee took up HB 1557, Parental Rights in Education by Rep. Joe Harding (R-Ocala). Dubbed the “Don’t Say Gay” bill by its opponents, HB 1557 effectively criminalizes elementary school teachers from even acknowledging homosexuality exists.

After much **heated debate** and passionate testimony from members of the public who shared the harm this bill will cause to Florida’s students in general and the LGBTQ+ population in particular, HB 1557 **passed on a nearly party line vote**. Rep. James Bush (D-Opa Locka) joined all the Republican members of the committee to support the bill.

Presidential Searches, Moving Quickly

The Presidential Searches bill has made its way through a committee for the second week in a row. This week both the **House (HB 703) and Senate (SB 520)** versions were considered. As a reminder, these bills would eliminate the current constitutional requirement that searches for college and university presidents be conducted in public.

Up first was HB 703 by Rep. Sam Garrison (R-Orange Park). The Post-Secondary Education and Lifelong Learning Subcommittee heard the bill. Several members expressed concerns about the bill and the amendments adopted. The main concern revolved around the shortened time frame for the release of the final candidate’s records; the house version of the bill now states that personal information of the final group of candidates is to be released 14 days before an interview or final vote on the applicants. Our member Nancy Rogers (UFF-FSU) echoed these concerns. The bill **passed out of committee by a vote of 14-4**, with Reps. Mike Gottlieb (D-Sunrise) and Kristen Arrington (D-Kissimmee) joining the majority in support of the bill.

SB 520 by Sen. Jeff Brandes (R-St. Petersburg) was considered later in the week by the Governmental Oversight and Accountability Committee. Unlike in the House, the Senate did not choose to shorten the timeline for the release of information. However, the Senate did change the bill’s effective date. While this change may seem inoffensive, many are concerned that this change has been made to allow the search for the next president of the University of Florida to be done behind closed doors. Matthew Lata from the United Faculty of Florida spoke against the bill, indicating the importance of open presidential searches for college and

university communities. Unfortunately, the bill passed through the committee on a **party-line vote of 4-2**.

Children With Developmental Delays

Wednesday's House Early Learning and Elementary Education agenda included **HB 15**, Children with Developmental Delays by Rep. Allison Tant (D-Tallahassee.) This bill will allow children to be identified as "developmentally delayed" through age 9, as federal law allows. The bill would continue funding children with developmental delays, rather than cutting off support at age 6. Lissa O'Rourke, an ESE PreK teacher and member of the St. John's Education Association, testified in support of this bill using her experience in the classroom to explain the need for the bill, which passed unanimously. The Senate companion was heard during the first week of session, where it also passed unanimously.

Constitutional Amendment Restrictions

Over the years, citizens have turned to Florida's constitutional amendment process to address problems that the Legislature failed to address, such as class size, a \$15 minimum wage and the restoration of voting rights. The House Public Integrity and Elections Committee met this week to consider **HJR 1127**, Limiting Subject of Constitutional Amendments Proposed by Citizens Initiative. The bill would limit the subject of constitutional amendments proposed by citizen initiatives to procedural matters and government structure. The bill is sponsored by Rep. Mike Beltran (R-Valrico).

Several committee members expressed concerns about the measure silencing the voters on issues during the debate. Most recently, citizens have used the process of amending the constitution to pass laws that the Legislature has repeatedly stymied. The final committee member to debate was Rep. Susan Valdez (D-Tampa), who stated, "we live in the United States of America, in the state of Florida, the state that proclaims to be the 'freest' of the land yet every which way that we turn we look at trying to find ways to limit the people's rights to do what they are entitled to do." The bill passed on a **party-line vote, 11-5**, and will be considered by the Judiciary Committee next.

Senate Maps Approved

Redistricting drama continues in Tallahassee this week. Gov. DeSantis released his congressional map to much fanfare. His proposal released Sunday night makes wide-scale changes to the current maps. A quick review of the plan shows it may benefit Republicans at the expense of Black and Hispanic voters.

The House and Senate are still going forward with their proposed maps that they have been working on. However, the governor's map could become a bargaining chip later, as the governor can veto the maps proposed by the Legislature.

The House maps are still in the final stages. This week the House State Legislative Redistricting subcommittee met to vote on **the House maps**, while the House Congressional Redistricting Committee decided not to convene this week. Late this week, the full Senate voted on both the congressional and Senate maps on Thursday. Both maps were voted on and passed, and the process will now be on hold until the House finalizes its maps. Eventually, the House and Senate will work together to create the final maps, much as they do on the budget.

Joining us for lobby visits?

- Register with the **Florida AFL-CIO Working Family Lobby Corps** prior to your trip.
(Please note: you will need your proof of vaccination or a negative COVID test taken 48 hours before your arrival in Tallahassee.)
- Register and **join FEA for a Lobby Visit Briefing**. Lobby Visit Briefings are held Monday at 6:00 pm.

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