

2025 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

SESSION WEEK 1: WEEK OF MARCH 3

THE LEGISLATURE IS IN SESSION

The 2025 Legislative Session officially commenced on Tuesday, March 4th with a newer feeling following the chaos surrounding feuds between the Legislative leadership and Governor DeSantis. If there was any doubt whether this session would be different than the previous six under Governor DeSantis, the Legislature overrode a veto, assembled additional veto override workgroups, and are considering their own legislation rather than DeSantis' suggestions. During opening speeches, a common sentiment observed among Legislative leadership is their goal to focus more on substantive issues affecting Floridians, rather than culture wars – which has been a theme in years past. Key issues highlighted include condominium reform, property insurance, rural economic development, and E-Verify expansion. A lurking issue that tends to dominate conversation however is the absence of federal COVID aid. Almost, if not all, legislators have emphasized this year is going to be extremely tough when it comes to the budget and funding projects.

Reflecting on Opening Day speeches, Democratic leadership noticed that many of the sentiments and major topics discussed by Republican leadership aligned with issues that Democrats have tried to champion for years without backing from their Republican colleagues. Both Senate Democratic Leader Pizzo and House Democratic Leader Driskell believe their party has been proactive in addressing the critical issues such as insurance reform, housing costs, and economic concerns, whereas Republicans are just now obtaining this appetite. Leader Pizzo hopes these issues that Republicans now pride themselves on are actually taken seriously, and were not just for show; this is a chance for bipartisan effort where special interests are set aside and struggling families receive the help they need.

LEADERSHIP PRIORITIES

SPEAKER PEREZ

In his opening remarks, Speaker Perez highlighted two of his top priorities which include tackling property insurance and prioritizing the cost-of-living issues that all Floridians are experiencing. Unlike in years past, Speaker Perez noted there will be no House Bill 1 or leadership priority bill; he believes he needs to prioritize Floridians as a whole and set aside his personal projects. Moreover, Speaker Perez stated the Legislature will be holding the government more accountable to Florida residents. For instance, the House Insurance & Banking Subcommittee has the ability to conduct hearings to investigate property insurance companies' profits. This would allow more insight into the raising rates and the possible "accounting tricks" utilized to hide profits and claim crises – which companies have done in years past. Speaker Perez also called upon the budget chairs to truly dive deeper and examine ways to reduce government spending and identify methods to save money.

PRESIDENT ALBRITTON

Coming as no surprise, especially with the statements that have been released in recent weeks, President Albritton is committed to rural economic development to enhance agriculture, education, healthcare, and commerce. President Albritton, a citrus grower himself, emphasized his focus on agriculture, stating he will not let it decline on his watch and is ready to implement newer technologies and recurring research to support a sector that once was flourishing. Moreover, he

highlighted the need for investments into farm-to-market roads to enhance agricultural supply chains, benefiting both farmers and consumers alike. In accordance with Speaker Perez, Albritton also wants to hold insurance industries accountable and find ways to improve governance to better serve Florida residents.

GOVERNOR DESANTIS

Governor DeSantis highlighted numerous reasons why the State of Florida is so successful in his speech including the economy and the state's commitment to law and order. He further emphasized why the state's economy is so strong including but not limited to low unemployment rates, strict government spending – expected to become stricter this year, low taxes, and a reduced per capita debt. Moreover, he suggested the elimination of the business rent tax to further bolster Florida's economy. In alignment with Legislative leadership, Governor DeSantis urged Legislators to support measures that lower taxes, specifically a review of the property tax system that has become such a burden to residents across the state. Governor DeSantis also urged Legislators to evaluate the process related to constitutional amendments getting on the ballot, provide stronger gun rights, and support relief efforts for affordable housing.

EDUCATION

TACKLING THE WORLD OF NIL

House Speaker Daniel Perez announced on Wednesday the creation of a new interim special committee called the Combined Workgroup on Collegiate NIL. The relatively new "name, image, likeness," or NIL, regulations have allowed NCAA collegiate athletes to earn money while competing, which has drastically changed the NCAA sports model and will continue to do so. This means college athletes can now profit based on NIL, which includes things such as selling jerseys, doing brand endorsements, creating podcasts or blogs, and much more. Speaker Perez did not specify which issues the committee would cover, but in his memo stated that several key legal complications have been identified since NIL's implementation in 2021. The special committee is made up of 21 Representatives from three separate committees and is chaired by Rep. Alex Rizo. The committee is expected to complete its work within a week after it begins on March 10.

CHARTER CONVERSION

On Tuesday, the House Education Administration Subcommittee voted favorably on HB 123 along party lines, with Republicans in favor. HB 123, sponsored by Rep. Alex Andrade, revises processes for conversion and job engine charter schools by giving more power to parents in this process. The bill would allow for a majority vote by parents, not by teachers, school employees, or board members, to decide whether or not to change a public school into a charter school. Local governments may still attempt to convert schools into charter schools if they have consistently received low ratings from state education officials over multiple years. However, this is not required under this provision. Additionally, the bill includes provisions that would also bar public school districts from buying new land if student enrollment has dropped over the past five years. It also mandates that school boards wishing to acquire new property must present their plans for its use at public meetings. The State Board of Education will establish rules for implementing the provisions for property management.

LAW ENFORCEMENT & CRIMINAL JUSTICE

UTHMEIER V TATE BROTHERS

Florida's new Attorney General, James Uthmeier, has announced that the state has initiated a criminal investigation into the claims of human trafficking, rape and other criminal activity against the Tate brothers, Andrew and Tristan, since their arrival from Romania last week. AG Uthmeier announced this via an X post on Tuesday, stating he has instructed the Office of Statewide Prosecution to draft search warrants and issue subpoenas in a now-active investigation after evaluating evidence brought to him. In a following post, Uthmeier said "Florida has zero tolerance for people who abuse women and girls. We will not allow it," which reiterated the sentiment of Governor DeSantis who said they are not welcome in Florida during a press conference. The Tate brothers are also under investigation in Romania, and they continue to deny any wrongdoing.

HALTING HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Republican Senator Jonathan Martin has filed a bill (SB 1804) that would increase penalties for human trafficking crimes, including making the trafficking of mentally incapacitated individuals or children under 12 a capital felony. This would make life in prison or the death penalty an option for traffickers convicted. The bill is one part of Florida Legislature's work to fight back against trafficking crimes, due to Florida ranking third in reported trafficking cases amongst the most populated states (738 cases in 2024). Senate Bill 1804 establishes guidelines for sentencing, mandating that prosecutors inform defendants of their intent to pursue the death penalty within 45 days of arraignment. For a death sentence to be imposed, the jury must unanimously identify at least two aggravating factors, such as previous trafficking convictions, firearm use, or targeting vulnerable victims. Any death penalty sentence imposed on an offender would be required to undergo review by either the Florida Supreme Court or the U.S. Supreme Court to assess its constitutionality. Republican Representative Berny Jacques has filed a similar House companion bill, HB 1283.

LIFE SENTENCES FOR THE MANSLAUGHTER OF COPS

Legislation has been proposed to include manslaughter in the list of crimes, alongside first- and second-degree murder as well as attempted murder, committed against a police officer, for which the mandatory minimum sentence is life imprisonment without parole. The bills, SB 234/HB 175 (sponsored by Republicans Senator Leek and Representative Baker) are both titled "Officer Jason Rayner Act" named for the police officer who was killed after a physical altercation that ended with a gunshot to his head. Officer Rayner's killer, Othal Wallace, instigated a physical confrontation after resisting lawful detainment and, in under 30 seconds, drew a firearm and fatally shot the officer. Community frenzy ensued after jurors convicted Wallace of a lesser manslaughter charge, which carries a maximum sentence of just 30 years in prison when a firearm is involved in the crime. The bills would also remove language clarifying that a person cannot resist an officer with violence or threats while the officer is performing official duties, which Rep. Baker says is necessary since "jurors can get confused."

The removal of the clarifying language has been the only contentious part of the bill. Democratic legislators have discussed some of the adverse effects that section would have, such as emboldening wrongdoers or leaving people no defense when facing an illegal arrest or use of force. The bill sponsors have considered these comments but affirmed that language elsewhere in Florida law would still ensure defendants could assert self-defense claims.

POLITICS & ELECTIONS

STRICTER PENALTIES FOR PARTY SWAPS

Current law requires candidates to confirm they have not been members of another party for a year before the election; however, there is no enforcement mechanism. Democratic Senator Kristen Arrington's bill passed its first committee combatting this discrepancy. If successful, her legislation would allow political parties and candidates to sue to remove candidates from the ballot if they are not affiliated with the party they seek to represent, or if they have not been of any party for at least 365 days before the general election. This legislation stems from two Democrats, Rep. Cassell and Rep. Valdes, who switched their party affiliation from Democrat to Republican earlier this session. After its unanimous approval, this bill will now head to the Judiciary Committee for consideration.

DEBATE ON BALLOT ACCESS

Representative Jenna Persons-Mulicka has filed HB 1205, which would require petition sponsors to post a \$1M bond before being allowed to circulate petitions. The provision would accelerate petition deadlines and require signatories to provide their driver's license number and the last four digits of their Social Security number. Additionally, the provision would mandate that signed petitions be submitted within 10 days, instead of the previous 30 days, to the election supervisors. The House Government Operations Subcommittee passed the provision, with Republicans arguing that additional protections are needed in the election process to safeguard the state constitution. This bill comes at a time when Governor Ron DeSantis is calling for further reforms to the process as a whole.

However, the bill has not moved forward without criticism. Many fear it could effectively end the ballot initiative process due to the proposed \$1 million bond, which could limit ballot initiatives to only wealthy interest groups. Many community advocates and Democratic lawmakers voiced their opposition to the provision during the Subcommittee's two-hour-long discussion.

2025 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

SCHEDULE

The 2025 regular session dates can be found [here](#) and the annual calendar of major events can be found [here](#).

SESSION

Week 2

- House Authorized Schedule for March 10-14, 2025, can be found [here](#).
- Senate Weekly Schedule for March 10-14, 2025, can be found [here](#).

REGULAR SESSION BILL STATISTICS

- *HOUSE*: 829 general bills filed; 21 of which have received a favorite committee report.
- *SENATE*: 889 general bills filed; 49 of which have received a favorable committee report.