

2025 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

SESSION WEEK 9: WEEK OF APRIL 28

SESSION EXTENDED FOR BUDGET

Around Friday, 10:30 PM, the House and Senate concluded the 60-day regular session with the final motion being to approve [House Joint Resolution 1631](#), which extended the session through 11:59 PM, June 6. With many deeming this the most chaotic legislative session Florida has ever seen, it now takes a one week break returning Monday, May 12 to begin budget conference.

Speaker Perez and President Albritton had been in a deadlock on the one item the Legislature is constitutionally required to pass – a balanced budget. The issue had been twofold: they disagreed on the overall amount of money that should be spent (based on comments Friday, they likely still disagree on this point, but not by much) and they also have not been aligned on Florida’s taxes (there does appear now to be internal consensus on the high level tax policies).

After budget allocations have been agreed upon, conference will begin (likely May 12 as noted above), and once completed there is a required 72-hour cooling off period before a final vote is made. Lawmakers must pass a budget by July 1, the start of Florida’s new fiscal year. Aside from the budget drama, there were several bills that crossed the finish line and will soon be sent to the Governor. Those bills and more details on the budget packages are detailed below.

The following table shows the bills that are approved for the extended session:

Bill	Title	Background
SB 0110	Rural Communities	President Albritton priority also known as Rural Renaissance.
SB 2500	Appropriations	Budget bill.
SB 2502	Implementing the 2025-2026 General Appropriations Act	The changes in statute (for one year) that accompanies the budget bill.
SB 2504	State Employees	Resolves collective bargaining dispute with state employees
SB 2506	Natural Resources	Updates grant funding criteria
SB 2508	Judges	Adds judges to various districts, circuits and counties throughout state
SB 2510	Prekindergarten Through Grade 12 Education	Changes funding criteria on various K12 programs, including CAPE funding
SB 2514	Health and Human Services	Revises various definitions in healthcare funding and updates nursing home regulations
HB 5013	State-funded Property Reinsurance Programs	Reduces the amount allowed to be transferred to Reinsurance to Assist Policyholders (RAP) from \$2B to \$900M.
HB 5015	State Group Insurance	Removing co-pay for state insurance from statute and setting rates in annual budget.
HB 5203	Capitol Center	Gives Governor and Legislative chambers statutory control over their areas of the Capitol.

HB 5501	Documentary Stamp Tax Distributions	Proposes to divert the \$150M going to FHFC for housing into general revenue
SB 7022	Retirement	Revises DROP program amongst other areas of FRS
SB 7030	Educational Scholarship Programs	Several changes to school choice funding programs, including creating a categorical for FES in the FEFP
HB 7031	Sales Tax Rate Reductions	Reduces state sales tax, among other sales taxes, from 6% to 5.25%
HB 7033	Taxation	Tax package focused on 6 to 5.25% state sales tax reduction and TDT distribution changes, among others.

TAXES

PROPERTY TAX COMMITTEE

Created by House Speaker Perez, the new House Select Committee on Property Taxes held its first meeting on Friday, May 2. The goal is to explore new ways to reduce property taxes burdens for Florida homeowners in a fiscally responsible way. This will be accomplished through the review of the current tax system and the consideration of any policy solutions that will alleviate the stress. However, the first meeting was just limited to introductions and a general overview of property taxes to the 27 Republicans and 10 Democrats that makeup the committee. As meetings continue, they will consider five major proposals that will likely need voter approval in the 2026 election.

TAX PLAN

Last Friday, the House passed a \$5.008 billion tax package ([HB 7033](#)) to reshape tourism funding and provide tax relief. One of the most contentious provisions in the package was to allow tourist development tax (TDT) revenue to be utilized toward property tax relief beginning in 2026. In response to the tourism industry's opposition, at least 25% of redirected TDT funds must still go toward tourism marketing efforts. Other items included in the package are the sales tax being cut from 6% to 5.25%, and the commercial lease tax decreasing from 2% to 1.25%. In the other Chamber, the Senate's proposal ([SB 7034](#)) totals \$1.83 billion and focuses more on consumer relief and avoids the controversial tourism tax provision. There are extended sales tax holidays, vehicle registration fee credits, and tax-free clothing and shoe purchases included. Both HB 7033 and HB 7031 are part of the extended session.

HEALTH CARE

SENATOR ROUSON TRIBUTE

On Wednesday, a bill ([SB 1620](#)) passed by the Senate and sponsored by Democrat Senator Darryl Rouson created extreme tension between the Chambers. The conflict has now spilled into broader budget negotiations with Senators having reservations about the House's motives. Senate Bill 1620 would create many reforms for mental health, but the most contentious provision surrounds the creation of a \$5 million research center at the University of South Florida that would focus on the overlap between addiction and mental health. Prior to the House receiving the bill, it received bipartisan support, with the Senate even amending the bill to name the research center "Darryl E. Rouson Center." Rouson is respected by many legislators for his public service and frankness about his substance use disorder recovery, and this bill seemed poised to pass as the Commission on Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder requested the facility. However, the clashing began, as

the House rejected the facility, saying the research center did not actually receive an endorsement from the Commission.

The House removed the facility from the bill along with other provisions, as Democrat Representative Christine Hunschofsky, who serves on the Commission, defended its removal citing the Commission did not recommend it. Senator Rouson, who is also a member of the Commission, has called for the Senate to accept the removal of the center, as he would rather see the current provisions pass, calling them more important than his name. Senators, including Republicans Jim Boyd and Ed Hooper, have given strong resistance to the House, and refuse to drop this issue, claiming it is not fair or acceptable. House Speaker Daniel Perez spoke on this issue calling it “emotionally blackmailing the House,” while Senate President Ben Albritton has remained silent. The Governor also chimed in on social media where he called the House’s actions petty. The Senate did ultimately pass the bill without the center.

GOVERNMENT, POLITICS, & ELECTIONS

AMENDMENT PETITION PROPOSAL

With growing concern that citizen petitioning has been corrupted by external influences, the Legislature has passed a measure ([HB 1205](#)) that works to prevent fraud in the petition process for proposed constitutional amendments. Its focus is on petition signature gathering by out-of-state contractors and paid circulators. Moreover, it imposes stricter rules including a \$1 million bond for initiative sponsors and mandatory training for certain petition circulators. Democrats had some opposition to the measure claiming it would suppress citizen participation and block future statewide ballot initiatives. Senator Carlos Guillermo Smith stated this is a deliberate attempt to prevent citizen-led amendments from reaching the ballot.

NEW PARENTAL RIGHTS OFFICE

Florida’s Attorney General James Uthmeier announced Florida will be the first state to implement the Office of Parent Rights (OPR). The Office will work to support families and defend parental authority; the goal is to have parents, not the government, raising children. It will address a wide range of concerns including blocked access to student records, unauthorized medical treatment and counseling, unauthorized collection of student data, and the lack of involvement of parents in issues surrounding their children. Additionally, an online portal is set to be established to report parental complaints.

EDUCATION

HOUSE EDUCATION BILL PASSES IN LAST NIGHT DRAMA-FILLED VOTE

Following intense debate on the House floor, HB 1115 sponsored by Republican Representative Susan Valdes, passed by a vote of 84-19. The House not only removed 10 provisions from the Senate amendment but also added several significant changes. Sponsored by Republican Representative Demi Busatta Cabrera, the adopted amendment revises residency and citizenship requirements for State University System (SUS) and Board of Governors (BOG) members, mandating – effective January 6, 2027 – members be U.S. citizens and either Florida residents or graduates of Florida institutions. It establishes term limits for State Board of Education (SBE) and Florida College System (FCS) trustees, and restricts BOG members to a single seven-year term with residency requirements. Effective January 1, 2026, it also requires financial disclosures be submitted by BOG members as well.

The bill prohibits SUS and FCS institutions from imposing conflicting graduation requirements rooted in any identity politics or historical distortion. It also reforms university and college presidential search processes by mandating specific committee structures, eligibility requirements, and removing the public records exemption for presidential applicants. Additionally, the measure expands instructional material transparency by requiring ISBNs, cost comparison, and license durations to be disclosed. Faculty must also post up-to-date syllabi including textbook lists for student access.

One of the most debated provisions involves changes to the Schools of Hope program. The legislation broadens the definition of “sponsoring entity” to include SUS and FCS institutions and allows sponsors to locate schools outside of opportunity zones. It introduces performance-based agreements and reporting requirements for all sponsors, while prioritizing enrollment for students living in Opportunity Zones. It also permits co-location with existing schools, grants access to unused district facilities, and limits supplemental funding to five years unless the school demonstrates high performance. Additionally, it gives the SBE authority to resolve disputes involving SUS and FCS sponsors. Lastly, starting July 1, 2027, to ensure financial stability, it mandates a transfer from the third-party administrator if the School of Hope Revolving Loan Program balance drops below \$25 million.

Republicans, who were proponents of the legislation, argued this provides students with an alternative education option and seeks to hold failing schools accountable through the implementation of new strategies and goals. Moreover, this expansion aims to attract high-performing charter schools to areas with underperforming public schools to improve students’ education. However, the Democrats who widely opposed the bill cited equity concerns in school resources, increasing educational disparities, and the undermining of the quality of public education in Florida.

CHARTER SCHOOLS

Charter schools will be allowed to implement stricter codes of conduct than traditional public schools, if the Governor approves [HB 443](#). After passing on party lines in both the House (86-25) and the Senate (30-7), this bill was largely debated due to its limited specificities on items other than the stricter conduct codes. While proponents of the bill state this provides charter schools with more flexibility related to discipline and academic standards, opponents believe this will lead to unequal treatment of students and reduced oversight.

SCHOOL START TIMES

On Tuesday, the House unanimously voted in favor of legislation ([SB 296](#)) to regulate school start times. Sponsored by Republican Senator Jennifer Bradley, this bill steps away from the provisions passed in 2023 which requires middle schools to not start before 8 AM and high schools to not start before 8:30 AM. Local school districts have voiced concern over the previous legislation due to logistical issues relating to items such as bus routes. Senate Bill 296 does not repeal the previous legislation but would allow school districts to create a report that says they have debated whether school start times could be moved back and what the fiscal impacts would be. The report must be submitted by July 1, 2026. Once the report is submitted, a school district would be in compliance with the 2023 law, regardless of whether schools start before 8 AM. The report must include the financial impact statements that the enforced start time would have, explanations for what the school district did to try to implement the start times, and a list of the unintended consequences created by the later start times. Now, people who originally opposed the 2023 legislation are saying “we told you so,” with Legislators like Democrat Representative LaVon Bracy Davis stating school officials were ignored during that legislative session. Even the original sponsors of the 2023 legislation have supported the current legislation to overturn the bills.

SCHOOL SAFETY

A major school safety bill ([SB 1470](#)) heads to the Governor's desk after passing both Chambers this week. Focused on improving emergency response procedures and safety protocols, the bill sponsor, Senator Burgess, stated training standards and lockdown procedures will be strengthened to keep both faculty and students safer. This bill allows temporary door locks during active threats, aligns school supervision hours to 30 minutes before and after school, and permits childcare facilities to partner with law enforcement for safe school officers through the Guardian Program. There was a proposed panic alert system and campus map integration component; however, it was removed. Therefore, its implementation will rely on future budget approval.

ALLERGY PREPAREDNESS

Democrat Senator Carlos Guillermo Smith's bill ([SB 1514](#)) will be heading to the Governor for its approval. Thus far, it has been a bipartisan measure that seeks to boost public and charter schools' medical emergency preparedness. It does this by requiring school staff to be trained so they can recognize and respond to anaphylaxis, which is a severe and potentially life-threatening allergic reaction. Moreover, it would also require schools to provide emergency action plans that are easily accessible for students that have allergies, particularly during extracurricular activities. If approved, the Department of Health and the State Board of Education would work together in order to create training programs that all school staff must go through.

BUSINESS REGULATIONS, AGRICULTURE, & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

RURAL RENAISSANCE REJECTION

Senate President Ben Albritton's rural renaissance priority ([SB 110](#)) received changes from the House that the Senate refused to accept. The bill's sponsor, Republican Senator Corey Simon, rejected and criticized the House's amended version, saying they purged the bill of important provisions and added in irrelevant language. The original concept of the bill was to improve education, economic development, health care, and transportation in rural counties. However, the House dissolved parts of the rural bill into other bills, which created a legislative "train." Now, the bill will be part of the extended session.

HEMP REGULATIONS FAIL

Sponsored by Republican Representative Michelle Salzman, both measures ([HB 7029](#), [HB 7027](#)) were postponed on their second reading, with Salzman stating they are no longer a focus. If passed, the bills would have created a 15% excise tax on hemp products that are THC-infused, limited packaging to opaque, single-color designs to distinguish the product from traditional snacks, and banned packaging that resembles popular designs like candy, animals, or cartoon characters. Additionally, the bills would have required these products pass independent lab testing, limited hemp-infused beverages to only having five milligrams of THC in each container, and would limit those able to sell said beverages to retailers with liquor licenses. The Senate version of these bills ([SB 438](#)), sponsored by Republican Senator Colleen Burton, passed the full Senate unanimously; however, was temporarily postponed on second reading. Senate Bill 438 had key differences, as it would ban any hemp products being sold within 500 feet of schools or daycares and would restrict any public advertising of hemp products visible from the sidewalk, park, or street.

AGRICULTURE

The Florida House recently passed the broad "Farm Bill," ([SB 700](#)) that covers a range of agricultural and regulatory topics, including restrictions on drone use over farmland and

preempting local laws regulating farm worker housing. However, the bill attracted significant attention due to the more controversial provisions, such as banning the fluoridation of public water supplies and limiting the marketing of plant-based foods. If passed, Florida would become only the second state to prohibit water fluoridation, a decision opposed by dental health experts who argue fluoride is essential for preventing tooth decay, particularly in underserved areas. Democratic Representative Anna Eskamani, who is a vegan, challenged a different provision that would prohibit the mislabeling of plant-based products as meat or dairy, but her proposed amendments were voted down. The sponsor, Republican Representative Kaylee Tuck, defended the plant-based product labeling, saying it focuses on being truthful and shared a personal experience of untruthful labeling. Additional measures in the bill include penalties for stealing checks from mailboxes, requirements for schools to support 4-H and FFA programs, and limitations on local governments' authority over housing for verified agricultural workers. The bill also includes a proposal to exempt agricultural land from property taxes and allocate funds for electric vehicle charging stations in counties with financial constraints. The bill passed 88-27 and now heads to Governor DeSantis for consideration.

FIRST RESPONDERS & PUBLIC SAFETY

SIDNEY HOLMES

On Wednesday, the House passed a claim bill ([SB 10](#)) that seeks to compensate Sidney Holmes for his 34 years of incarceration. The bill would award Holmes \$1.7 million due to him being exonerated for an armed robbery conviction where he was incarcerated for 34 years. Holmes was in the House gallery when it was passed. Lawmakers approved a provision that awarded \$50,000 for each year he was imprisoned. Under current Florida Law, those who are wrongfully imprisoned are allowed to be compensated up to \$2 million under the Victims of Wrongful Incarceration Act, but this excludes those who have previous convictions. Holmes had a previous charge, as he was convicted of being the driver in a robbery in 1984, thus unable to seek compensation. After he was freed by a judge from his 400-year sentence in 2023, the Legislature has tried to reimburse him for his time in prison, as the Chambers are not completely restricted by the Victims of Wrongful Incarceration Act; they are allowed to pass the claim bill despite Holmes' criminal record.

WRONGFULLY JAILED RECEIVE COMPENSATION

The Victims of Wrongful Incarceration Act, which was passed in 2008, could soon be repealed if Governor DeSantis approves a bill that removes it. This Act, which is a part of the "Clean Hands" approach, prevents those who were previously convicted of a crime from being able to receive compensation when they are wrongfully incarcerated. Florida is the last state to still use this approach, and there have been many attempts since 2017 to remove the law. New legislation ([SB 130](#)), sponsored by Republican Senator Jennifer Bradley, passed the Senate unanimously last month and the House unanimously on Tuesday. The bill nullifies the Victims of Wrongful Incarceration Act and expands compensation for Floridians who are wrongfully convicted by allowing those with other convictions to receive just compensation. Republican Representative Traci Koster has been filing this bill every year since 2021 and has not changed it once. If all exonerees become eligible, Florida would incur a \$15 million cost due to all the newly eligible Floridians, as 91 people have been exonerated in Florida since 1989, yet only five have reached a state settlement. Under current law, individuals cleared of wrongdoing by the court that convicted them are entitled to \$50,000 per year of wrongful imprisonment, with a cap of \$2 million. The bill would extend the period for seeking compensation from 90 days to two years, and create a process for exonerees to reimburse the state if they later receive civil settlements.

DEATH PENALTY EXPANSION

On Wednesday, the Senate passed a measure ([HB 653](#)) in a 25-12 vote dealing with the death penalty. The bill, sponsored by Republican Representative Jeff Holcomb, would introduce a new aggravating factor to be considered when deciding whether to apply the death penalty in capital cases involving the assassination or attempted assassination of the president, vice president, or governor. The bill has received broad pushback, with opponents showing a great discomfort with the idea of expanding the death penalty and pointing out that federal law already has provisions in place for those scenarios. Representative Holcomb used the attempted assassinations of Donald Trump to explain the purpose of his bill and his inspiration to send a message that Florida will hold offenders accountable for the harm they cause. Ironically, under this bill, it would not have been applicable to the assassination attempts on Donald Trump, as he was a candidate in between his presidential terms.

FIREARM ACCESS

After passing both Chambers, legislation ([HB 383](#)) now heads to the Governor for consideration. If approved, military servicemembers and law enforcement officials, including correctional officers and correctional probation officers (CPOs), will be exempt from Florida's three-day waiting period when purchasing firearms. Moreover, the bill allows CPOs to carry concealed firearms when they are off duty. Though it passed the House unanimously, and the Senate on 33-3 vote, Democratic Senators Rosalind Osgood, Tina Polsky, and Carlos Guillermo Smith were in opposition.

2025 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

SCHEDULE

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

GOVERNOR'S ACTIONS

Approved

- [SB 36](#) Florida Statutes
- [SB 38](#) Florida Statutes
- [SB 40](#) Florida Statutes
- [SB 42](#) Florida Statutes
- [HB 421](#) Peer Support for First Responders
- [HB 513](#) Electronic Transmittal of Court Orders
- [HB 549](#) Gulf of America
- [HB 575](#) The Designation of the Gulf of Mexico
- [HB 655](#) Pet Insurance and Wellness Programs
- [HB 1313](#) Trust Funds/Re-creation/Resilient Florida Trust Fund/DEP
- [HB 157](#) Service of Process
- [HB 479](#) Leaving the Scene of a Crash Involving Only Damage to Vehicle or Property
- [HB 597](#) Diabetes Management in Schools
- [HB 615](#) Electronic Delivery of Notices Between Landlords and Tenants
- [HB 791](#) Surrendered Infants
- [HB 1173](#) Florida Trust Code
- [HB 1195](#) Fentanyl Testing
- [HB 7003](#) OGSF/Financial Technology Sandbox Applications/OR

REGULAR SESSION BILL STATISTICS

→ *HOUSE*: 857 general bills filed; 190 have passed the House; 106 passed both Chambers.

→ *SENATE*: 908 general bills filed; 162 have passed the Senate; 89 passed both Chambers.