

2026 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

SESSION WEEK 1: JANUARY 12 – JANUARY 16

SESSION WEEK 1 RECAP

Florida's 2026 Legislative Session opened with a strong emphasis on affordability across the state, as Governor Ron DeSantis delivered his final State of the State address. He framed the session around continuing Florida's "free state" model, outlining key priorities that include property tax reform, immigration enforcement, insurance and housing relief, education policy, social services, and investments in environmental protection and infrastructure. While much of the address highlighted accomplishments from his two terms, the Governor also renewed his call for significant property tax cuts and urged lawmakers to act swiftly on his remaining legislative priorities.

House Speaker Danny Perez and Senate President Ben Albritton echoed affordability as a central theme, even as they acknowledged the challenges ahead. Speaker Perez and President Albritton both opened the regular session by emphasizing rising costs for Floridians and the need to address taxes, insurance, and economic growth. Perez reflected on last year's difficult and extended session, urging members to move forward and focus on governing. Albritton, entering his final session as the Senate president, renewed his commitment to a rural economic development initiative and suggested that sweeping property tax changes may be better handled after session, setting up potential friction with the House and Governor.

BUDGET

If anyone thought last session's budget was rough, Senate Appropriation Chair Ed Hooper warned this session will be even worse. Chair Hooper informed lawmakers that they will likely need to agree on a budget that cuts spending levels by at least \$1 billion from the current year plan, and may need to cut up to \$4 billion. "There's no federal COVID money coming into the coffers," Hooper said. "We're now adjusting our expectations back to 2018/2019 numbers." The fiscal year budget was about \$89 billion. This year, the state's budget is about \$115 billion.

SPECIAL SESSION

Senate President Ben Albritton said he supports Governor Ron DeSantis' plan to call a special legislative session in April to revisit Florida's congressional district boundaries. DeSantis announced earlier this month that lawmakers would return to Tallahassee after the regular session ends in March to consider a mid-decade redistricting. The Governor cited a pending U.S. Supreme Court case from Louisiana that could change how states are allowed to consider races when drawing congressional maps. Supporters of redrawing Florida's lines argue the current districts rely on racial considerations to create minority-access districts. Albritton said the expected Supreme Court ruling should provide clearer guidance on how redistricting should be handled moving forward.

CAMPAIGNS AND ELECTIONS

The GOP Primary: Lieutenant Governor versus U.S. Congressman

Lieutenant Governor Jay Collins announced Monday that he is entering the Republican primary for governor, seeking to succeed Governor Ron DeSantis. A former state senator and U.S. Army Green Beret, Collins is positioning himself as a strong cultural conservative aligned with DeSantis' governing style, though the governor has not formally endorsed a successor. In his announcement, Collins emphasized his military background and leadership experience, saying his time as a Green Beret shaped his view that public office is a public trust. Collins joins a growing Republican field that includes U.S. Rep. Byron Donalds (who has been endorsed by President Donald Trump), former House Speaker Paul Renner, and investor James Fishback.

PROPERTY TAXES

HJR 203 Draws Mixed Reactions as It Moves Closer to the House Floor

[HJR 203](#) proposes a phased elimination of non-school property taxes for homestead properties by increasing the exemption by \$100,000 each year for ten years, with full exemption beginning in 2037. The bill also prohibits counties and municipalities from reducing law enforcement funding below recent funding levels. Supporters, alongside the sponsor, argued the proposal would make homeownership more affordable, force local governments to find efficiencies, and prioritize public safety funding. Opponents raised significant concerns about long-term impacts on local government revenues, warning that the loss of a stable funding source could lead to service reductions, higher fees, or cost shifts to renters, businesses, and non-homesteaded property owners. Local governments, counties, labor groups, housing advocates, environmental representatives, and faith-based organizations testified that the proposal lacks an implementation plan and could undermine core services, including fire protection, water management, housing programs, and disaster response. Fire service organizations supported an amendment aimed at protecting first responder funding, though broader concerns remained. The bill passed the committee on a party-line vote, with all Republicans voting in favor and all Democrats voting against it.

RURAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE

Rural Renaissance

The Florida Senate approved [SB 250](#) on Wednesday, advancing a major rural economic development package known as the Rural Renaissance. Sponsored by Senator Corey Simon, the roughly \$152 million initiative focuses on expanding education options, improving housing and infrastructure, and modernizing commerce in rural communities. The bill creates an Office of Rural Prosperity within the Department of Commerce to coordinate state assistance and directs funding toward road and infrastructure upgrades, including improvements to farm to market roads that support Florida's agricultural supply chain. It also prioritizes rural communities for land planning grants, revises the criteria for fiscally constrained counties, and establishes a flexible community block grant program. Additional general revenue funds are redirected to support the initiative. Rural health care provisions tied to federal funding were removed from the bill before final passage. The proposal is a top priority of Senate President Ben Albritton, who renewed his focus on rural development at the start of session. While the bill passed the Senate last year, its prospects in the House remain uncertain, where a similar companion measure has been filed.

EDUCATION

School Vouchers

Legislation ([SB 318](#)), sponsored by Senator Don Gaetz, focuses on accountability in Florida's expanded school voucher program valued at \$4 billion, was approved. A recent state audit found officials could not track where thousands of students were enrolled and could not account for \$270 million in education funds. Lawmakers also cited fraud, including fictitious students who were created to improperly collect voucher money. The bill was fast tracked early in the session, signaling its priority for Senate leadership. It would separate voucher funding from public school funding to improve transparency, require unique student identification numbers, and mandate regular attendance verification before funds are released. The bill received bipartisan support, with Democrats praising efforts to address the issue rather than dismiss it. The measure now moves to the House.

Truancy Notification

Legislation ([HB 1181](#), [SB 1190](#)) filed by Representative Hart-Lowman and Senator Rouson recently in both chambers would require school boards to create a mandatory electronic system to alert parents and school officials when a student reaches a certain number of absences.

Receivership Option for School Districts

Governor Ron DeSantis raised the possibility this week of the state placing school districts into receivership if they fail to follow state guidance, pointing specifically to Broward County. His comments followed questions about Broward's recent financial struggles, including budget cuts, school closures, and concerns over leases and contractor spending. DeSantis said a state takeover could be the fastest way to fix what he called long-standing management problems and criticized the district as being driven by union interests rather than parents and students. He noted that the Commissioner of Education would need to determine whether current law allows such action or if legislative approval would be required. Broward school officials pushed back, highlighting improved academic performance, including consecutive A ratings and the elimination of D and F schools.

TECHNOLOGY

AI Bill of Rights

A technology trade group is opposing ([SB 482](#)) Florida's proposed "Artificial Intelligence Bill of Rights," arguing it could slow innovation and create compliance challenges for companies that operate across state lines. In a letter to the Florida Senate, the Computer & Communications Industry Association said the bill's broad definitions and state-specific rules could place Florida at a disadvantage as national and international AI standards continue to develop. Supporters of SB 482 say the bill is designed to protect consumers by requiring transparency when people interact with AI, adding safeguards for children using AI chatbots, limiting the commercial use of AI-generated likenesses, and restricting certain state contracts with foreign-controlled AI companies.

Hyperscale Data Centers

As Florida lawmakers consider legislation ([HB 1007](#)) that would put limits on the development of large data centers, they are not the only ones responding to public worries about the facilities' electric and water use footprint. Lawmakers in several states have introduced about 100 bills seeking to regulate the centers, which highlights the computing power needed to power the growth of artificial intelligence platforms.

HEALTH CARE

Medical Review in Child Abuse Cases

The Senate Committee on Children, Families, and Elder Affairs unanimously passed a bill ([SB 42](#)) that would require extra medical evaluation before parents are arrested in certain child abuse cases where injuries could be linked to underlying health conditions. The proposal, which does not apply to sexual abuse cases, is intended to reduce the risk of wrongful arrests.

Insurance Coverage for State Employees

Lawmakers are considering [SB 1070](#), a bill that would require Florida's state employee insurance plan to cover obesity treatments, including FDA-approved weight management drugs. The proposal sets eligibility guidelines and requires annual reports to track participation and costs. Supporters argue the coverage could lower long-term health costs by reducing chronic conditions, while critics note concerns about the high price of obesity medications and the plan's existing budget challenges.

BUSINESS REGULATION AND WORKFORCE

Taxation of Tobacco Products

The Senate Regulated Industries unanimously approved a bill ([SB 754](#)) that would change how heated tobacco products are taxed in the state. The proposal would define these products in law and exempt them from being taxed as cigarettes, treating them more like vaping products instead. Supporters say heated tobacco products do not burn tobacco and may contain fewer harmful toxins than traditional cigarettes. Some lawmakers raised concerns about youth access to nicotine products, though the bill focuses only on tax policy and does not change age restrictions.

E-Verify

On Thursday, the House approved [HB 197](#) that would require the use of the federal E-Verify system to ensure new hires are legally authorized to work. Sponsored by Representative Jacques and Kiyon Michael, this legislation would extend to small employers with 25 or less employees. The bill passed on an 80-30 vote with two Republicans voting against it: Representative J.J. Grow and Representative Susan Plasencia.

ENVIRONMENT

Legislature Advances Environmental Proposals

Florida lawmakers took up several environmental issues this week, including land conservation, water regulation, and coastal management. Bipartisan bills ([HB 441](#), [SB 546](#)) would increase transparency before state-owned conservation land can be sold or exchanged by requiring public notice, appraisals, and explanations at least 30 days in advance. Supporters say the measures are meant to strengthen protections for conservation lands and give the public more time to review proposed changes. The House Intergovernmental Affairs Subcommittee also approved legislation ([HB 479](#)) that would shift more authority over water management and environmental regulation from local governments to the state, with funding penalties for local governments that do not comply.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND LAW ENFORCEMENT

Jason Raynor Act

Legislation ([SB 156](#)) known as the Officer Jason Raynor Act moved closer to the Senate floor this week after clearing the Senate Appropriations Committee on Criminal and Civil Justice by a 6 to 1

vote. The bill, by Senator Tom Leek, would require life sentences without parole for individuals convicted of manslaughter in the death of a law enforcement officer. Leek said the proposal is intended to remove any ambiguity in state law that defendants have used to justify violent resistance during arrests. The bill is named after Daytona Beach Police Officer Jason Raynor, who was killed in 2021 while attempting to arrest a suspect. Although the shooter received a 30-year sentence, the case prompted renewed efforts to strengthen penalties. In addition to harsher sentencing, the bill expands protections to include correctional, probation, and auxiliary officers, increases penalties for assaults on law enforcement, and adds a good faith standard for police conduct. Law enforcement groups support the measure, while some lawmakers raised concerns about potential unintended effects.

Statewide Consolidation of 911 Call Centers

Legislation ([SB 1586](#), [HB 1427](#)) filed by Senator Nick DiCeglie and Representative Danny Alvarez would require Florida counties to consolidate emergency call handling into a single 911 center per county or region. The bills aim to standardize and streamline emergency response statewide, building on a model already used in more than 25 counties. Counties would be required to submit a unification plan by Jan. 1, 2027, and fully route all emergency calls through a single center by 2029. Counties that fail to meet the planning deadline would see 911 authority shift to the local sheriff's office. Supporters argue consolidation would reduce costs, improve response times, and strengthen coordination during large-scale emergencies, noting that unified 911 systems were recommended by the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Commission.

2026 SESSION BILL STATISTICS

As of January 16

Senate		
	Filed	Passed Senate
General Bills	859	2 (review them here)
Local Bills	8	0
House		
	Filed	Passed House
General Bills	791	8 (review them here)
Local Bills	57	0

2026 LEGISLATIVE SESSION DATES

Schedule

- Election Dates & Activities [[here](#)]
- Senate 2026 Regular Session [[here](#)]
- Major Budget Events [[here](#)]
- Bill Filing & Appropriation Project Request Deadlines [[here](#)]
- Important House Legislative Dates for the 2026 Regular Session [[here](#)]

House Calendar

[House Authorized Meeting Schedule for January 19-23, 2026 - 1st Amended](#)

Senate Calendar

- [Weekly Schedule of Senate Meeting Time Allocations for January 19-23, 2026](#)
- [Weekly Schedule of Senate Meeting Time Allocations for January 26-30, 2026](#)