

Capitol Report

March 7, 2014

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OVERVIEW:

Week one in Tallahassee the League of Women Voters of Florida was front-and-center on critical issues! The first week of the legislative session has ended with action on a number of priority bills for the LWVF. Medicaid expansion, vouchers for private school scholarships, in-state tuition for Dreamers, election laws and environmental issues all took center-stage in Tallahassee.

The League sponsored a major news conference that highlighted the critical importance of Florida accepting Medicaid expansion dollars. President Deirdre Macnab joined Medicaid expansion bill sponsors Senator Rene Garcia (R-Hialeah) and Representative Amanda Murphy (D- New Port Richey) calling on the legislature and Governor to accept \$51 billion in federal Medicaid expansion funding. In a press event held in the Capitol, dozens of LWVF Lobby Corps members held signs and expressed support for the measures, which would provide health insurance to about 1.2 million uninsured Floridians. The measure is also anticipated to create approximately 121,000 high-paying jobs in the state. To date, House Speaker Will Weatherford has rejected the funding, although the Senate passed a similar bill accepting the program in the 2013 session. More details follow in the priority bills section below.



Sen. Garcia speaks at the League's news conference on extending healthcare to Florida's uninsured. Representative Amanda Murphy also spoke, along with a representative from Doctors for America and an area small business owner.

Other priority-one action this week included the following:

SCHOOL VOUCHER EXPANSION:

Expansion of the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship program moved forward as the House Finance and Tax Subcommittee took up proposed committee bill (PCB) 14-02 sponsored by Rep. M. Diaz, Jr. (R-Hialeah). An overflow audience, which included dozens of private school students, members of the clergy and parents filled the committee room in support of the program, which provides vouchers to low-income students. Currently, the program is funded primarily by donations from corporations that receive credit against corporate-income taxes, insurance-premium taxes and similar charges.

The bill would allow retailers to divert sales-tax payments to the program, significantly increases the cap on the program from \$200 million to \$800 million, and would raise the income eligibility limit to include up to 260% of the federal poverty level, or \$62,500 for a family of four.

Private schools who accept students on under the Corporate Tax Scholarship Program are not required to:

- take the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT)
- publically report student achievement gains or test scores,
- have certified teachers
- use the state adopted education curriculum.

The subcommittee voted along party lines (11-7) to advance the measure. Arguments against the bill from members included the need to fully fund public schools, the lack of accountability, and the lack of parity between public and private school accountability. Members supporting legislation stated that parents should have the choice as to how they want to educate their children and if the private schools are not performing, parents will move them back to the public school system. The League and the Florida Board of Education testified in opposition to the bill.

The PCB now goes back over to the Speaker's office to be assigned a bill number and committee stops. We will keep you informed as action on this item advances.

EXPANDING HEALTH CARE IN FLORIDA/ GETTING FLORIDA'S FAIR SHARE:

Senator Rene Garcia (R-Dade) has introduced legislation expanding health care coverage in Florida by accepting \$51 billion in federal Medicaid expansion funding. SB 710 establishes the Healthy Florida program, which would administer it. Similar legislation was introduced by Senator Joe Negron (R-Stuart) and passed by the Senate in the 2013 legislative session. We will be working to secure support for a companion bill in the House, and full passage of Medicaid expansion for Floridians.

SPRINGS PROTECTION: The LWVF is assisting in the review of SB 1576 introduced by Senator Charles Dean (R-Inverness), intended to provide for the protection of springs,

rivers and other water basins in Florida. The bill is intended to control over-allocations of water and reduce nutrient pollution of those resources. We are working with the bill drafting committee to fine-tune the legislation, which is anticipated to be scheduled for committee hearings once the language changes are finalized. The bill will establish protective measures for outstanding Florida springs, reduce pollution from wastewater and fertilizer contamination, and prevent excessive withdrawals that are depleting our spring's resources.

IN-STATE TUITION FOR DREAMERS: Both the Senate and the House have bills revising residency requirements for tuition purposes for children of undocumented immigrants, allowing certain persons who are not classified as residents for tuition purposes but are exempt from payment of out-of-state fees. HB 851, filed by Representative Jeanette Nunez (R-Miami), and SB 1400 filed by Senator Jack Latvala (R-Clearwater) are moving through the legislature with initial support. The House bill passed favorably in the Education Appropriations subcommittee and is headed to the Appropriations committee on its next and final stop.

Senator Latvala's bill (SB 1400) has not been scheduled to be heard yet, and has been assigned four committee stops, beginning with the Education committee. The League is actively supporting both of these pieces of legislation.

ON-LINE VOTER REGISTRATION: Efforts to require the Department of State to develop an online voter registration system have begun moving forward with a Senate proposed committee bill (SPB 7068) scheduled to be heard before the Senate Ethics and Elections Committee on Monday, March 10. The League is supporting this legislation and is actively lobbying committee members to advance this bill.

The League is also supporting SB 846 by Senator Jack Latvala (R-Clearwater), expanding required annual ethics training for several quasi-government entities. The bill makes clear that members of the governing bodies of those entities are subject to certain standards of conduct, anti-nepotism provisions, voting conflicts and post-service lobbying restrictions. LWVF continues to monitor and support the changes currently contained in the bill.

TRACKING LEGISLATIVE ACTIONS:

The following link will take you to the entire list of bills that your LWVF is tracking. You may click on any bill and be taken to the state website where you can learn about the bills, committee stops, as well as members and the legislative process.

Please click [here](#) to access the list of bills the League is currently tracking.

Every Friday during session you will receive a weekly *Capitol Report* in your inbox. Please share them with others. They will be brief, provide a progress report on League issues, and let you know WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP!

Get Involved!

Debbie Harrison Rumberger is the League's professional lobbyist for the 2014 legislative session. Updates on League legislative issues will be provided on a regular basis through *Capitol Report*, which is published every week during the session. Important information may also be accessed at www.leg.state.fl.us.

Watch for your *Capitol Report* each Friday of the session for news on priority issues and what you can do to help. For updates on or copies of proposed legislation, call legislative information at 1-800-342-1827 or visit the Florida Online Sunshine homepage at www.leg.state.fl.us. For more information about the League's advocacy, check out www.TheFloridaVoter.org.