

# Capitol Report

March 21, 2014

Filed by: **Debbie Harrison Rumberger, LWVF Governmental Consultant**

## **OVERVIEW:**

The third week of session has been a critical one for many of the League of Women Voters of Florida's priority issues with positive action on 3 of 4 major bills. A major expansion of vouchers for private schools is dead, while in-state tuition for undocumented students and the long-awaited springs protection legislation made important gains. Our one disappointment was the withdrawal of an election reform bill that would have created online voter registration in our state. Here is what took place on these bills:

### **SPRINGS PROTECTION (SB 1576) RECEIVES UNANIMOUS SUPPORT IN FIRST COMMITTEE:**

Protections for Florida's springs, initiated by LWVF, received unanimous support from the Senate Environmental Conservation and Preservation Committee. The comprehensive springs bill passed its first committee stop on Thursday after months of revisions and the adoption of a committee rewrite. SB 1576 by Sen. Charlie Dean (R-Inverness) would provide an estimated \$378 million for septic tank hookups and wastewater improvements. The bill also provides a more protective standard for water pumping and requires minimum flows. New concentrated animal feeding operations and slaughterhouses in springs areas would be prohibited. Incoming Senate President Andy Gardiner (R-Orlando) stated that this was a legacy initiative that would be a priority throughout his tenure. LWVF Natural Resources Chair Chuck O'Neal applauded the passage as a critical first step to protecting Florida's beloved springs. The bill has two more committee stops in the Senate, while the companion bill (HB 1313) has not yet been heard in the first of three committee stops in the House.

### **EXPANSION OF PRIVATE SCHOOL VOUCHERS (HB 7099 ) REPORTEDLY DEAD:**

Week 3 of the legislative session has seen a flurry of activity surrounding efforts to expand the Tax Credit Scholarship Program, sponsored by Rep. Manny Diaz (R-Hialeah). The bill would allow sales tax revenue to be sent to private scholarship organizations, increase the maximum household income allowed for applicants, and increase annual funding for private school vouchers. The bill was strongly opposed by the League, the Florida Teachers Association, a number of local PTA's and the Anti-Defamation League. The bill passed its only two committee stops along party lines, but had not reached the floor for a full vote. A companion bill in the Senate (SB 1620) by Senator Bill Galvano (R- Bradenton) was pulled from its first committee stop on Thursday over the House's refusal to include accountability standards for students in the voucher programs in their version of the bill. Under the program, instructors are not required to be certified teachers and students are not required to pass state testing standards. Senate President Don Gaetz (R- Niceville) has said he cannot support giving public dollars to private schools without these provisions in place. We will continue to keep an eye out for any future movement.

### **IN-STATE TUITION (HB 851/SB 1400) PASSES HOUSE BUT FACES BATTLE IN SENATE:**

The Florida House passed HB 851, sponsored by Representative Jeanette Nunez (R-Miami), moving the future of the bill to the Senate. The bill enjoys the strong support of House Speaker Will Weatherford. On the Senate side, there are indications of a rockier road. LWVF Immigration Committee Chair Elizabeth Pines traveled to the Capitol to build support for the bill, which will allow undocumented students to attend Florida colleges at in-state tuition rates. Qualifying students are required to have spent 4 years in a state secondary school and must apply with 24

months of graduation. The House passed the bill by a measure of 81-33 exposing a contingent of Republican lawmakers opposed to the legislation.

A similar bill is experiencing a more difficult path in the Senate. SB 1400, sponsored by Senator Jack Latvala (R-Clearwater), passed its first committee stop by a 5-4 margin, bringing outspoken opposition from some Republican lawmakers. Senate President Don Gaetz (R-Niceville) has stated he does not support the bill, as have the chairs of two of the three committees the bill must pass through in order to reach a vote on the floor of the Senate. The League will continue to advocate in support of passage of this bill as it moves through the Senate.

**ONLINE VOTER REGISTRATION:**

A major Senate elections bill (SPB 7068) was pulled from the committee agenda late Monday after an inability to reach agreement on including limitations on absentee ballot drop-off locations in the bill language. The elections reform package would have required the implementation of an online voter registration system, making Florida the 17<sup>th</sup> state to adopt such a program. A companion bill sponsored by Representative Alan Williams (D-Tallahassee) had not yet been placed on agenda for its first committee stop, indicating a lack of support for the measure on the House side. The bill has been declared dead for this session.

**LWV LOBBY CORPS FOCUSES ON HEALTHCARE FOR ALL FLORIDIANS:**

Members of the League took action to keep healthcare for all Floridians in the forefront at the Capitol this week. Holding signs calling for legislators to accept \$51 billion in federal funding to provide health coverage to Florida's working poor, Lobby Corps members distributed information and spoke to individuals as they entered the Capitol Wednesday, then moved to the outside of the meeting room for the Senate Health Committee, the first stop for SB 710, which would accept the federal dollars. The Lobby Corps will continue efforts to keep healthcare for all Floridians in the spotlight. For information on getting involved, please contact Kathy Winn at [kathywinnclan@embarqmail.com](mailto:kathywinnclan@embarqmail.com).



LWVF members and supporters advocate for the expansion of healthcare at the Capitol in Tallahassee.

## **TRACKING LEGISLATIVE ACTIONS:**

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

**[Please click here for a link to all of the bills LWVF is tracking this session.](#)**

Every Friday during session you will receive a *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.

Watch for your *Capitol Report* each Friday of the legislative 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](http://www.leg.state.fl.us). For more information about the League's advocacy, check out [www.TheFloridaVoter.org](http://www.TheFloridaVoter.org).