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## 2026 Legislative Session Interim Update - Week 1

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The opening week of Florida's 2026 legislative session set the tone for a politically charged 60-day stretch. Governor Ron DeSantis delivered his final State of the State address on January 13, using the occasion to highlight his administration's accomplishments over the past seven years. Governor DeSantis also outlined a proactive agenda for 2026 focused on eliminating property taxes for homestead residences, establishing an AI Bill of Rights to regulate the use of artificial intelligence, and continuing educational reform efforts. The address unfolded against a backdrop of visible tension between the Governor and the Legislature. This political dynamic may shape the session dynamics as much as policy.

Legislative activity began at a rapid pace, with lawmakers immediately taking up high profile issues ranging from gun laws and immigration verification to medical malpractice and school vouchers. Early in the week, both chambers prepared to advance major bills, including the Senate's "Rural Renaissance" initiative aimed at boosting funding for rural communities and improving infrastructure, healthcare access, and schools. Meanwhile, the House moved forward on proposals to lower the rifle purchase age to 18, raise sovereign immunity caps, and expand E-Verify requirements for businesses. This week's agendas already full, the rapid pace shows no signs of slowing.

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### Opening Day of Session

Florida's 2026 Regular Legislative Session began on Tuesday, January 13, with the House and Senate presiding officers sharing their priorities for the next 60 days and a joint session to receive Governor Ron DeSantis's final "State of the State" address.

President Ben Albritton (R-Wauchula) began his [opening remarks](#) saying that "collaboration and communication are the driving forces" of the Senate. The President said the Senate will continue evaluating state spending, reducing state debt, cutting taxes, and saving for the future. He announced a renewed commitment to his "Rural Renaissance" initiative and noted that "affordability" is on Floridians' minds. [Senate President Address Video](#)

In his [opening comments](#), House Speaker Danny Perez (R-Miami) said his goals remain unchanged from last session – insisting on the House’s independence, but that the Chamber “stands ready to work with anyone who is willing to put the needs of our State first.” Perez listed “affordability and insurance; taxes and the economy; prescription drug prices and the rising cost of public benefits,” as priorities but did not provide details. [House Speaker Address Video](#)

Governor DeSantis outlined his administration’s accomplishments over the past seven years, including stabilizing the property insurance market and lowering auto rates, record funding for Everglades restoration, addressing illegal immigration, and ensuring universal school choice. Further, the Governor called on lawmakers to approve a constitutional amendment for the November 2026 ballot that would provide property tax relief to Floridians, a message he has emphasized since the summer.

He also signaled his support for several measures introduced by legislators, including the Senate President’s Rural Renaissance initiative, limits on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) in local governments, strengthened illegal immigration enforcement, and expansion of 2nd Amendment rights. The Governor shared his concerns about artificial intelligence (AI), noting that while it has useful applications, advances must be developed in a “moral and ethical” manner. [Governor DeSantis State of the State Video](#)

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## Physical Therapy Legislation

The Florida Physical Therapy is working with Legislators to promote health and wellness by updating the physical therapy practice act. [SB 1262](#) by Sen. Nick DiCeglie (R-St. Petersburg) and [HB 869](#) by Rep. Adam Anderson (R-Tarpon Springs) allow licensed physical therapists to provide services for health promotion, injury prevention, wellness or fitness consist with the education and training of a physical therapist. The bills exempt these services from the statutory requirement that a practitioner of record review and sign a plan of treatment, an administrative step that can be burdensome or delay access to general wellness and services.

## Legislation of Interest (listed alphabetically)

**Acupuncture** – [SB 672](#) by Sen. Alexis Calatayud (R-Miami) and [HB 169](#) by Rep. Jose Alvarez (D-Kissimmee) revise licensure requirements for acupuncturists including allowing for the order and administration of herbs, homeopathic and other nutritional supplements.

**Advanced Practice Registered Nurse Autonomous Practice** – [SB 138](#) by Sen. Keith Truenow (R-Tavares) and [HB 301](#) by Rep. Jason Shoaf (R-Port St. Joe) authorize certain advanced practice registered nurses to engage in autonomous practice to provide mental

**Interstate Podiatric Medical Licensure Compact** – [SB 1312](#) by Sen. Ana Maria Rodriguez (R-Doral) and [HB 1213](#) by Rep. Gallop Franklin (D-Tallahassee) create the Interstate Podiatric Medical Licensure Compact and the Interstate Podiatric Medical Licensure Compact Commission and specify requirements for a podiatric physician to apply for and receive an expedited license in a member state. [SB 1314](#), also by Sen. Rodriguez, and [HB 1215](#) by Rep. Franklin provide public records exemptions for the compact and the commission.

health services as defined by the Board of Nursing.

*HB 301 was approved by the House Health Professions and Programs Subcommittee on Wednesday, 1/14 and will be heard in the House Health and Human Services Committee on Wednesday, 1/21.*

#### **Alzheimer's Disease Awareness**

**Initiative - SB 578** by Sen. Corey Simon (R-Tallahassee) and **HB 513** by Rep. Dean Black (R-Jacksonville) require the Department of Elderly Affairs to contract for the development and implementation of the Alzheimer's Disease Awareness Initiative.

*SB 578 was approved by the Senate Children, Families and Elder Affairs Committee on Monday, 1/12.*

#### **Autonomous Practice by a Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetist – SB 462**

by Sen. Ana Maria Rodriguez (R-Doral) and **HB 375** by Rep. Mike Giallombardo (R-Cape Coral) authorize autonomous certified registered nurse anesthetists (CRNAs) to perform CRNA-specific acts without an established supervisory physician protocol.

*HB 375 was approved by the House Health Professions and Programs Subcommittee on Wednesday, 1/14 and will be heard in the House Health and Human Services Committee on Wednesday, 1/21.*

#### **Background Screenings – SB 1168**

by Sen. Erin Grall (R-Fort Pierce) and **HB 1069** by Rep. Dana Trabulsy (R-Fort Pierce) specify additional disqualifying offenses under the background screening requirements for certain persons, require AHCA to review and determine eligibility for all criminal history checks submitted to the Care Provider Background Screening Clearinghouse by specified agencies, provide that, beginning on a specified date, an independent sanctioning authority is considered a qualified entity for the purpose of participating in the clearinghouse, and require qualified entities conducting background criminal history checks to designate a user administrator for a specified purpose.

#### **Continuity of Care in Health Insurance Contracts – SB 114**

by Sen. Shevrin

**Managed Care Plans – SB 568** by Sen. Gayle Harrell (R-Stuart) and **HB 531** by Rep. Webster Barnaby (R-Deland) revise Medicaid managed care contract requirements to prohibit managed care plans from reviewing certain prior authorization claims for medical necessity, and require that managed care plans provide coverage for durable medical equipment and complex rehabilitation technology from a qualified provider within the network of the enrollees choosing.

#### **Mandatory Human Reviews of Insurance**

**Claim Denials – SB 202** by Sen. Jennifer Bradley (R-Flemming Island) and **HB 527** by Rep. Hillary Cassel (R-Hollywood) require that insurers' decisions to deny a claim or any portion of a claim be made by qualified human professionals and prohibit the use of algorithms, artificial intelligence, or machine learning systems as the sole basis for determining whether to adjust or deny a claim.

**Motor Vehicle Insurance – SB 522** by Sen. Erin Grall (R-Fort Pierce) and **HB 769** by Rep. Meg Weinberger (R-West Palm Beach) repeal the existing no-fault statutes and references to personal injury protection coverage throughout the Florida Statutes. The bills establish mandatory bodily injury liability coverage requirements in place of personal injury protection and update insurance policy disclosure, coverage, and reporting requirements, replacing PIP-related language with bodily injury and property damage liability provisions.

**Naturopathic Medicine – SB 542** by Sen. Ileana Garcia (R-Miami), **SB 688** by Sen. Ana Maria Rodriguez (R-Doral) and **HB 223** by Rep. David Smith (R-Winter Springs) reestablish licensure and regulation of naturopathic physicians, and establish new standards for the practice. The bills provide licensure authority over naturopathic physicians to DOH and create the Board of Naturopathic Medicine to assist DOH in the regulation of naturopathic physicians.

**Parental Rights – SB 166** by Sen. Erin Grall (R-Fort Pierce) and **HB 173** by Rep. Kim Kendall (R-St. Johns) revise

Jones (D-Miami Gardens) and **HB 577** by Rep. Marie Woodson (D-Pembroke Pines) require health insurers and contracted health care practitioners to provide 60 days' notice to policyholders before contract termination and allows certain policyholders to continue coverage and care for a specified timeframe.

**Coverage for Orthotics and Prosthetics Services** – **SB 1110** by Sen. Keith Truenow (R-Tavares) and **HB 1301** by Rep. Felicia Robinson (D-Miami Gardens) authorize AHCA to authorize and pay for specified orthotics and prosthetics services for Medicaid recipients, require individual health insurance policies, group, blanket, and franchise health insurance policies and health maintenance contracts to provide coverage for specified orthotics and prosthetics services, and prohibit health insurers and health maintenance organizations from denying claims under certain circumstances.

**Coverage for Treatment of Stuttering** – **SB 922** by Sen. Carlos Guillermo Smith (D-Orlando) and **HB 785** by Rep. Anna Eskamani (D-Orlando) authorize AHCA to pay for certain services and devices as a treatment for stuttering for Medicaid recipients, authorize speech therapy in person and via telehealth as a treatment for stuttering, require certain individual health insurance policies, group health insurance policies, and health maintenance contracts, respectively, to provide coverage for specified services and devices as treatments for stuttering.

**Department of Health** – **SB 902** by Sen. Ileana Garcia (R-Miami) and **HB 733** by Rep. Ann Gerwig (R-Wellington) broadens eligibility requirements for the dental student loan repayment program. The bills revise the definition of "low-THC cannabis," require qualified physicians and medical directors of medical marijuana treatment centers to renew their training course certification biennially, prohibit medical marijuana treatment centers from being located within certain distance of specified areas, update DOH duties relating to the Early Steps Program and Early Steps Extended Option, revise eligibility

requirements for the provision of maternal health and contraceptive information and services to minors. The bills require consent from a parent or guardian for a minor's treatment for certain diseases, repeal a provision relating to minors' access to outpatient crisis intervention services and treatment, and require school districts to provide parents with specified information before the district administers certain questionnaires or forms to students.

**Physician Assistants** – **SB 668** by Sen. Keith Truenow (R-Tavares) provides for the registration of physician assistants to engage in practice without physician supervision, provides financial responsibility requirements for registered physician assistants, specifies activities registered physician assistants may engage in without physician supervision while prohibiting surgical procedures deeper than subcutaneous tissue, and requires registered physician assistants to provide new patients with specified information either before or during the initial patient encounter.

**Practice of Chiropractic Medicine** – **SB 1524** by Sen. Corey Simon (R-Tallahassee) and **HB 439** by Rep. Nan Cobb (R-Eustis) authorize board certified chiropractic physicians to possess, prescribe, and administer vitamins, nutrient preparations, homeopathic remedies, dietary supplements, and epinephrine and authorize licensed pharmacists to fill, compound, or dispense certain nutritional prescriptions prescribed by certified licensed chiropractic physicians.

**Practice of the Profession of Pharmacy** – **SB 868** by Sen. Barbara Sharief (D-Davie) and **HB 1021** by Rep. RaShon Young (D-Orlando) authorize pharmacists who meet specified criteria to, at the direction of a licensed physician, administer medications at a Level I or Level II trauma center under certain circumstances and require trauma centers to retain certain documentation to employ pharmacists to perform such tasks.

**Public Assistance** – **SB 1758** by Sen. Don Gaetz (R-Pensacola) authorizes

requirements for developmental evaluation and early intervention services, revise transition to education requirements for children with disabilities, provide that committing criminal offense relating to murder is cause for immediate suspension of health care practitioner's license, and revise eligible individuals for University of Florida Center for Autism and Neurodevelopment's autism micro-credential.

**Drowning Prevention Education – SB 606** by Sen. Carlos Guillermo Smith (D-Orlando) and **HB 503** by Rep. Anna Eskamani (D-Orlando) require DOH to develop educational materials on drowning prevention safety measures and safe bathing practices and require hospitals, birth centers, and home birth providers to provide the educational materials to new parents and caregivers as part of their postpartum education and care.

*SB 606 will be heard in both the Senate Education PreK-12 Committee and the Senate Health Policy Committee on Tuesday, 1/20.*

**Dry Needling – SB 914** by Sen. Alexis Calatayud (R-Miami) and **HB 867** by Rep. Adam Anderson (R-Tarpon Springs) define the terms “dry needling” and “myofascial trigger point,” requiring the Board of Occupational Therapy to establish minimum standards of practice for the performance of dry needling by occupational therapists, including specified standards, and require the board, if it deems it necessary for patient safety, to adopt additional supervision and training requirements for occupational therapists to perform dry needling on specified areas.

*HB 867 will be heard in the House Health Professionals and Programs Subcommittee on Wednesday, 1/21.*

**Employment Eligibility – SB 1278** by Sen. Jonathan Martin (R-Fort Myers) and **HB 197** by Rep. Berny Jacques (R-Clearwater) require all private employers, rather than only those employing more than specified number of employees, to use E-Verify system to verify new employee's employment.

AHCA to conduct retrospective reviews and audits of certain claims under the state Medicaid program, requires the agency to seek federal approval to implement mandatory work and community engagement requirements for able-bodied adults as a condition of obtaining and maintaining Medicaid coverage, requires AHCA, in consultation with the Department of Children and Families, to develop a business plan to implement specified provisions, revises the purpose of the Medicaid Pharmaceutical and Therapeutics Committee to include creation of a Medicaid preferred physician-administered drug list, a Medicaid preferred product list, and a high-cost drug list, and requires the department to develop and implement a food assistance payment accuracy improvement plan.

**Recovery of Damages for Medical Negligence Resulting in Death – SB 1700** by Sen. Erin Grall (R-Fort Pierce) and **HB 6003** by Rep. Dana Trabulsky (R-Fort Peirce) and Rep. Anna Eskamani (D-Orlando) delete a provision prohibiting the recovery of certain damages by specified parties related to the decedent in wrongful death proceedings.

*HB 6003 passed the House 88-17 on Thursday, 1/15 and now goes to the Senate.*

**Recruitment and Retention of Speech-language Pathologists – SB 574** by Sen. Shevrin Jones (D-Miami Gardens) and **HB 471** by Rep. Kevin Chambliss (D-Homestead) require the Florida Department of Education to develop and maintain a statewide strategic plan for the recruitment and retention of speech-language pathologists, specify components of the plan and strategies for recruitment and retention, and provide school district and charter school requirements relating to submitting specified data for the plan.

**Respiratory Care Interstate Compact – SB 970** by Sen. Tom Wright (R-Port Orange) and **HB 1235** by Rep. Bill Conerly (R-Lakewood Ranch) enact the Respiratory Care Interstate Compact and require member states to meet certain requirements to join and participate in the

*HB 197 passed the House 80-30 on Thursday, 1/15 and now goes to the Senate.*

**Florida Health Choices Program – SB 440** by Sen Tom Leek (R-St. Augustine), **SB 1460** by Sen. Jonathan Martin (R-Fort Myers) and **HB 141** by Rep. Taylor Yarkosky (R-Clermont) rename the "Florida Health Choices Program" as "Florida Employee Health Choices Program" and revise purposes and components of the program. The bills revise eligibility and participation requirements for vendors under the program, the types of health insurance products that are available for purchase through program, removes certain pricing transparency requirements, revise the structure of the insurance marketplace process under the program, remove the option for risk pooling under the program, and remove exemptions from certain requirements of Florida Insurance Code under the program.

**Health and Human Services - HB 693** by Rep. Mike Redondo (R-Miami) known as the "Big Beautiful Healthcare Frontier Act" and part of the Florida House's "Florida's New Frontier in Healthcare" proposal, aligns state rules with new federal requirements for Medicaid, CHIP and SNAP, tightens eligibility and verification standards, and deregulates certain aspects of healthcare delivery — including removing certificate-of-need requirements for long-term care providers, extending independent practice rights for advanced-practice nurses, creating interstate licensure compacts for physician assistants and EMS professionals, and broadening the scope of dental hygienists. **HB 695**, also by Rep. Redondo, provides exemptions from public meetings requirements for the Interstate Commission for EMS Personnel Practice and the Physician Assistant Licensure Compact Commission.

**Health Care – SB 1756** by Sen. Clay Yarborough (R-Jacksonville) and **HB 917** by Rep. Jeff Holcomb (R-Springhill) make changes to vaccination policy in Florida statutes including in public health advisories and public health emergencies,

compact. The bills provide criteria that a respiratory therapist licensee must satisfy to practice under the compact, authorize a certain licensing authority or government agency to establish the scope of practice for a licensee providing therapy in a remote state, authorize member states to participate with other member states in joint investigations of licensees under certain circumstances, and establish the Respiratory Care Interstate Compact Commission. **SB 972**, also by Sen. Wright, and **HB 1237**, by Rep. Conerly provide a public records exemption for the Commission.

**Right of Medical Conscience of Health Care Providers and Health Care Payors – SB 670** by Sen. Clay Yarborough (R-Jacksonville) and **HB 551** by Rep. Dean Black (R-Jacksonville) authorize a health care provider or health care payor to commence a civil action if the Attorney General fails to do so after 180 days for an alleged violation of the provider's or payor's medical conscience rights.

**Rural Communities – SB 250** by Sen. Corey Simon (R-Tallahassee) is a comprehensive package of legislative proposals to create opportunities for rural communities to expand education offerings, increase health care services, and modernize commerce. More information [here](#).

*SB 250 passed the Senate 39-0 on Wednesday, 1/14 and now goes to the House.*

**State Medicaid Program - HB 1453** by Rep. John Snyder (R-Palm City) authorizes AHCA to conduct retrospective reviews and audits of certain claims under state Medicaid, requires AHCA and DCF to implement mandatory work and community engagement requirements for able-bodied adults as condition of obtaining and maintaining Medicaid coverage, revises components of Medicaid prescribed-drug spending-control program to include preferred physician-administered drug list, preferred product list, and high-cost drug list, provides that determinations of overpayment under Medicaid program may be based upon retrospective reviews,

require licensed health care practitioners to inform a parent or legal guardian of a minor child of risks, benefits, safety, and efficacy of specified vaccines, obtain signatures from parents or legal guardians before the administration of a vaccine, and provide a parent or legal guardian with the option of alternative vaccination schedules. The bills authorize pharmacists to provide ivermectin without prescription and immunity from civil and criminal liability and disciplinary action. Finally, the bills authorize parents to exempt their children from health examinations or from administration of immunizing agents based on conscience grounds, and require DOH to make publicly available, by posting on its Internet website, exemption forms for parents and legal guardians. In addition, HB 917 contains provisions that creates liability for health care providers under the Florida Patient bill of rights and prohibits discrimination against a patient based on the patient's vaccination status.

**Health Care Coverage – SB 1760** by Sen. Jason Brodeur (R-Lake Mary) establishes the Joint Legislative Committee on Medicaid Oversight, requires Medicaid plans to report on encounters for which payment was denied and encounters for which a health care provider was reimbursed by the plan on a capitated basis, requires any third-party administrative entity contracted by a Medicaid plan to adhere to all pertinent requirements of the Medicaid program, requires managed care plans to report to AHCA and OIR the existence of and specified details relating to certain affiliations, revises requirements for contracts between a pharmacy benefit managers and a pharmacy benefits plans or programs and a participating pharmacy, and revises and specifies additional practices pharmacy benefit managers are prohibited from engaging in.

investigations, analyses, or audits conducted by AHCA to determine possible fraud, abuse, overpayment, or recipient neglect, and requires the AHCA to implement Integrated Managed Care Pilot Program in designated regions.

**Use of Professional Nursing Titles - SB 36** by Sen. Barbara Sharief (D-Davie) and **HB 237** by Rep. Michelle Salzman (R-Cantonment) authorize certain nurses the title Doctor of Nursing Practice and the abbreviation D.N.P., and the title of Doctor of Philosophy and the abbreviation PhD. The bills also require doctoral degree holders to specify their profession when using the term “doctor.”

*HB 237 was approved by the House Health Professions and Programs Subcommittee on Wednesday, 1/14.*

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We hope this summary is helpful. We look forward to working with you during the 2026 Legislative Session. Please contact us if you have any questions.

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