



2026 Legislative Session Interim Update - Week 6

The Legislature returned to Tallahassee last week to begin the final week of Interim Legislative Committee meetings before the start of the 2026 Legislative Session on January 13th. In the House, the week was “Artificial Intelligence Week,” where committee meetings explored the emerging technology’s effect on state agencies, k-12 education, higher education, health care, agriculture, emergency management, infrastructure providers and the legal profession. In addition, committees in the Senate and House advanced a variety of bills related to housing, transportation, licensure, patient-directed medical orders and public records. Most notably, Governor DeSantis released his proposed 2026–27 state budget, setting the fiscal and policy framework that lawmakers will evaluate as they prepare for the 2026 legislative session.

Governor’s Budget Proposal

Governor Ron DeSantis released his [Floridians First FY 2026–27 Budget](#), a \$117.4 billion proposal emphasizing fiscal discipline, tax relief, priorities that are important to Florida. The budget includes \$16.75 billion in reserves, \$250 million in accelerated debt reduction to keep the state on track to reduce its debts by more than 50%, and \$118 million to fully fund the Budget Stabilization Fund. Key provisions include expanded sales tax holidays and \$300 million to support potential statewide property tax reforms. Major investments target K–12 and higher education, workforce training, law enforcement recruitment, transportation and infrastructure, rural development, workforce housing, and environmental priorities— notably \$1.4 billion for Everglades restoration and water quality.

The Governor’s Budget provides more than \$159 million for behavioral health services, along with \$187 million from the national Opioid Settlement Agreement to expand treatment, prevention, and recovery programs. It also allocates \$31.8 million to continue expanding the CORE Network. To support cancer research, the proposal includes more than \$278 million, including \$40 million for the Cancer Connect Collaborative Research Incubator, and consolidates \$197.5 million into a unified program to support cancer innovation, care, and research. The budget includes \$36.6 million to strengthen the child welfare system, increase support for foster families, improve placement stability, and expand recruitment for foster parents and Guardian ad Litem volunteers, \$3 million for the Alzheimer’s Disease Initiative, and \$7.5 million to expand services through the Community Care for the Elderly and Home

Care, with the goal of supporting seniors who are at risk of out-of-home placement. Lastly, the budget invests \$130 million for nursing education programs to help address nursing shortages and \$8.6 million to support capital improvements for the state-run veterans' nursing homes.

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 health services as defined by the Board of Nursing.

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.

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 CRNAs to perform CRNA-specific acts, such as conducting a pre-anesthesia evaluation, ordering and administering the anesthetic as determined appropriate, monitoring and interpreting patient's vital signs, and managing the patient during surgery and in recovery, without an established supervisory protocol.

Connecting to Care Act – **SB 294** by Sen. Ana Maria Rodriguez (R-Doral) and **HB 407** by Rep. Jose Alvarez (D-Kissimmee) create the "Connecting to Care Act" and authorize a pharmacist to

Mandatory Human Reviews of Insurance Claim Denials – **SB 202** by Sen. Jennifer Bradley (R-Flemming Island) requires that insurers' decisions to deny a claim or any portion of a claim be made by qualified human professionals and prohibits the use of algorithms, artificial intelligence, or machine learning systems as the sole basis for determining whether to adjust or deny a claim. **HB 527 was approved by the House Insurance and Banking Subcommittee on Tuesday, 12/9**

Medicaid Coverage of Blood Pressure Monitoring Devices – **SB 736** by Sen. Danny Burgess (R-Zephyrhills) defines the terms "blood pressure cuff" and "validated at-home blood pressure monitor," requires AHCA to provide coverage for validated at-home blood pressure monitors and blood pressure cuffs for certain Medicaid recipients who have a prescription for a validated at-home blood pressure monitor, and provides requirements for follow-up care for Medicaid recipients to continue receiving coverage.

Medicaid Providers - **SB 40** by Sen. Barbara Sharief (D-Davie) and **HB 163** by Rep. Felicia Robinson (D-Miami Gardens) require the AHCA to establish standards to ensure that Medicaid enrollees have access to network providers during state holidays and outside of regular business hours.

Naturopathic Medicine – **SB 542** by Sen. Ileana Garcia (R-Miami) and **HB 223** by Rep. David Smith (R-Winter Springs) reestablishes licensure and regulation of naturopathic physicians, and establishes new standards for the practice. The bill provides licensure authority over naturopathic physicians to DOH and creates the Board of Naturopathic Medicine

administer medication for the treatment of opiate addiction.

Continuity of Care in Health Insurance Contracts – **SB 114** by Sen. Shevrin 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.

Department of Health – **HB 733** by Rep. Ann Gerwig (R-Wellington) broadens eligibility requirements for the dental student loan repayment program. The bill revises the definition of "low-THC cannabis," requires qualified physicians and medical directors of medical marijuana treatment centers to renew their training course certification biennially, prohibits medical marijuana treatment centers from being located within certain distance of specified areas, updates DOH duties relating to the Early Steps Program and Early Steps Extended Option, revises eligibility requirements for developmental evaluation and early intervention services, revises transition to education requirements for children with disabilities, provides that committing criminal offense relating to murder is cause for immediate suspension of health care practitioner's license, and revises eligible individuals for University of Florida Center for Autism and Neurodevelopment's autism micro-credential.

Drug Prices and Coverage – **HB 697** by Rep. Jennifer Kincart Jonsson (R-Bartow) known as the "Prescription Reduction Incentives and Competition Enhancement Act" (PRICE Act) and part of the Florida House's "Florida's New Frontier in Healthcare" introduces a "most-favored nations" prescription drug pricing model, requires manufacturers to report international drug prices, caps what insurers and pharmacies pay, regulates Pharmacy Benefit Manager (PBM) practices, and mandates drug formularies during the plan year. Specifically the bill requires prescription drug manufacturer

to assist DOH in the regulation of naturopathic physicians.

Parental Rights – **SB 166** by Sen. Erin Grail (R-Fort Pierce) and **HB 173** by Rep. Kim Kendall (R-St. Johns) revise 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 – **HB 439** by Rep. Nan Cobb (R-Eustis) authorizes board certified chiropractic physicians to possess, prescribe, and administer vitamins, nutrient preparations, homeopathic remedies, dietary supplements, and epinephrine and authorizes 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) authorizes 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 requires trauma centers to retain certain documentation to employ pharmacists to perform such tasks.

permitholders to annually report to AHCA international drug price data, requires AHCA to publish annually prescription drug and product reference prices, requires pharmacies to charge cash-paying customers up to reference prices, prohibits PBMs from forcing pharmacies to dispense drugs at a loss and to requires PBMs to reimburse out of network pharmacies at the same rate as in network pharmacies. The bill requires insurers and PBMs to maintain frozen formularies prohibiting midyear changes that remove medication reclassify drug tiers or increase out of pocket costs. Finally, the bill provides that savings as a result of the act must be used to reduce premiums and patient costs sharing obligations.

Employment Eligibility – HB 197 by Rep. Berny Jacques (R-Clearwater) requires all private employers, rather than only those employing more than specified number of employees, use E-Verify system to verify new employee's employment. **HB 197 was approved by the House Commerce Committee on Thursday, 12/11 and now goes to the House floor.**

Florida Health Choices Program – SB 440 by Sen Tom Leek (R-St. Augustine) 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,

Recovery of Damages for Medical Negligence Resulting in Death – HB 6003 by Rep. Dana Tabulsky (R-Fort Peirce) and Rep. Dr. Anna Eskamani (D-Orlando) deletes a provision prohibiting the recovery of certain damages by specified parties related to the decedent in wrongful death proceedings.

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.

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. The bill invests in farm-to-market roads, requires the state land planning agency to give preference for technical assistance funding to local governments located in a rural area of opportunity, revises the conditions required for a county to be considered a fiscally constrained county, creates the Office of Rural Prosperity within the Department of Commerce, requires the Office of Rural Prosperity to administer the Renaissance Grants Program to provide block grants to eligible communities, creates the Public Infrastructure Smart Technology Grant

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.

Interactions with Artificial Intelligence – HB 659 by Rep. Christine Hunschofsky (D-Coconut Creek) requires operators of companion chatbot platforms to display specified information on any application, browser, or format used to access companion chatbots on platform and implements protocols protecting users, especially minors, from harm and misleading content. The bill requires anonymous or standard age verification and additional safeguards for known minors, including break reminders and blocking explicit sexual content, requires such operators to file specified annual reports with Department of Legal Affairs, and provides that violation constitutes unfair or deceptive act or practice.

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.

Program within the Office of Rural Prosperity, expands the existing FRAME program to include medical doctors or osteopathic doctors who are board certified or board eligible in emergency medicine, establishes the Stroke, Cardiac, and Obstetric Response and Education (SCORE) Grant Program, appropriates additional funding to enhance Medicaid payments to reimburse rural hospitals similar to Medicare reimbursement, and creates the Florida Arterial Road Modernization Program within the Department of Transportation. More information [here](#). **SB 250 was approved by the Senate Appropriations Committee on Wednesday, 12/10 and now goes to the Senate floor.**

School Attendance Immunizations – SB 626 by Sen. Carlos Guillermo Smith (D-Orlando) adds hepatitis B, chickenpox, haemophilus influenzae type b, and pneumococcal disease to the list of immunizations in statute that are required for school attendance.

Transparency in Health Care – SB 596 by Sen. Ileana Garcia (R-Miami) defines the term “personal benefit,” requires health care practitioners to report any personal benefit received from a pharmaceutical company to DOH, requires the department to establish uniform reporting procedures and a publicly accessible online database for the reports, and requires the department to establish certain guidelines for health care practitioners.

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.”

Legislative Session. Please contact us if you have any questions.

Florida Physical Therapy Association

800 N Calhoun St. #1A

Tallahassee, FL 32303

www.fpta.org

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