

2026 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

SESSION WEEK 3: JANUARY 26 – JANUARY 30

SESSION WEEK 3 RECAP

Week three of the Florida legislative session was dominated by debates over property taxes, government spending, and the balance of power between the state and local governments, alongside continued movement on major criminal justice, education, and health care proposals. The DeSantis administration intensified the property tax discussion with the release of a 98-page Department of Government Efficiency report criticizing spending by 13 cities and counties, arguing that rising salaries and discretionary programs have fueled rapid budget growth amid increasing property tax revenues. Local officials pushed back, calling the report politically motivated, particularly as lawmakers advanced multiple constitutional property tax amendments, including [HJR 213](#), which would slow growth under the Save Our Homes cap. Simultaneously, the Senate moved forward with a targeted tax measure to prevent homeowners from being penalized for storm-hardening improvements.

In education, lawmakers considered a wide range of bills addressing educator preparation, school safety, facilities funding, and curriculum issues, while the Florida Board of Governors prepared to vote on a one-year ban on hiring new faculty on H-1B visas, raising concerns about impacts on research universities. Florida also opted into a new federal school-choice tax credit program that could expand scholarship access to middle-income families beginning in 2027. Criminal justice legislation advanced rapidly, including the "Officer Jason Raynor Act," which would increase penalties for crimes against law enforcement and restrict resistance to arrest, as well as a bipartisan overhaul of domestic violence laws and a bill to streamline Florida's bail system.

Health care debates intensified as the House advanced a prescription drug price cap bill amid warnings of potential shortages, while advocates filed suit to block planned cuts to the state's HIV/AIDS drug assistance program. Lawmakers also moved transportation bills targeting unauthorized immigrant truck drivers and regulating e-bike speeds, and cultural and symbolic measures gained traction, including proposals to rename Palm Beach International Airport and mandate the use of specific historical place names in state materials. Economic and business developments included a new Florida-Germany cooperation agreement, a slight rise in the state's unemployment rate, and progress on legislation restricting vape marketing to minors. Environmental policy also remained active, with a House panel advancing a bill requiring consideration of cattle grazing on conservation lands, drawing sharp debate over conservation priorities versus agricultural interests.

POLITICS

DeSantis Administration and Property Taxes

The DeSantis administration released a [98-page report](#) from Florida's Department of Government Efficiency criticizing spending by 13 cities and counties, accusing local governments of lacking budget discipline and allowing spending to grow rapidly due to rising property tax revenues. The report targets increase in salaries, mental health and homelessness programs, arts funding, overtime pay, and what it describes as improper or unlawful spending on diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives, as well as investments in electric vehicle programs, climate efforts, bike lanes, and public art. It argues that personnel costs are a major driver of growth, noting that compensation in Florida's 10 largest cities rose by \$1 billion over four years, outpacing both population growth and inflation. The report recommends placing limits on municipal salaries, requiring public posting of salaries, reviewing whether some of Florida's 411 cities should be consolidated or eliminated, banning local green energy mandates, expanding restrictions on DEI efforts, and making permanent the state CFO's authority to audit local government spending. Local officials, particularly in St. Petersburg, pushed back and argued the report is politically motivated and designed to justify property tax cuts that could reduce funding for essential services like police and fire.

CAMPAIGNS AND ELECTIONS

Marijuana Initiative Signatures Updated After Lawsuit

Florida elections officials updated signature totals for the proposed recreational marijuana amendment after delays tied to a lawsuit over potentially invalid petitions. Smart & Safe Florida now has 714,888 verified signatures, about 40,000 more than two months ago but still well short of the 880,062 needed for the November ballot, along with required district-level thresholds. The update comes amid enforcement of the state's new ban on out-of-state petition circulators ([HB 1205](#)) and follows the group's failed 2024 legalization attempt, which fell below the 60% voter-approval requirement after a state-funded opposition campaign.

WORKPLACE LAW

Minimum Wage Exemption

A renewed proposal to let certain Florida trainees voluntarily work for less than the state's minimum wage cleared its first House committee on an 11-6 vote. [House Bill 221](#) would allow participants in internships, work-study programs, and pre-apprenticeships to waive the voter-approved \$15 minimum wage. Supporters say it would help young and low-skilled workers gain experience, while opponents argue it invites exploitation, worsens financial hardship, and may violate the state constitution. Critics also warn the bill lacks real enforcement against employer coercion. Sponsor Representative Ryan Chamberlin says the measure addresses unintended limits the minimum-wage amendment places on training opportunities. A Senate companion has not yet been heard, and similar legislation stalled last year amid Senate skepticism.

TAXES

Third Property Tax Cut Proposal Heads to House Floor

House lawmakers advanced a third property tax-related constitutional amendment, [HJR 213](#), which would slow the growth of taxable property values under the Save Our Homes cap. Instead of allowing homesteaded values to rise up to 3% each year, the proposal would cap increases at 3% over three years; non-homesteaded properties would be limited to 15% over three years rather than 10% annually. Sponsor Representative Griff Griffiths said the change would push local governments to prioritize spending without undermining their operations. Democrats and local officials warned it could strain city and county budgets and shift costs onto renters and businesses. Two other tax-cutting amendments, one phasing out non-school homestead taxes and another increasing the homestead exemption for insured homeowners, are also ready for House floor debate. Governor Ron DeSantis has made putting a property tax reduction measure on the November ballot a priority.

Senate Moves to Block Property Appraisers from Home Hardening Tax

A Senate committee advanced [SB 434](#), a targeted property-tax measure designed to ensure homeowners aren't penalized for making wind-mitigation upgrades. Senator Tom Leek's bill would bar property appraisers from increasing a home's taxable "just value" solely because the owner added storm-resilience features such as reinforced roof decks, secondary water barriers, wind-resistant shingles, storm shutters, or stronger roof-to-wall connections. Leek argued that homeowners shouldn't face higher taxes for taking steps the state encourages to reduce storm damage and insurance costs. The proposal would take effect in July but apply only to mitigation work completed after January 1, 2027, meaning upgrades made before then could still influence valuations. A similar House bill, [HB 617](#), has been filed but has not yet been heard in committee.

EDUCATION

First Hearing for Many Education Bills

Lawmakers enter week three of session with packed House and Senate education agendas focused on educator preparation, facilities, harmful materials, and school safety. On Tuesday, the Senate Education PreK-12 Committee heard [SB 564](#) which would allow student poll volunteers; [SB 1062](#) speech and debate education; [SB 1718](#) educator preparation and certification changes; [SB 1340](#) (dyslexia/dyscalculia screening); and [SB 1646](#) education facility funding formula.

The House Education & Employment Committee also took up [HB 1119](#), defining and prohibiting harmful materials in public schools. The bill passed its first House stop last week; its Senate companion, [SB 1692](#), has not yet been heard.

The Senate Education Postsecondary Committee heard [SB 1376](#) which would expand genetic counseling programs and [SB 1570](#) creating a statewide missing-persons project for individuals with special needs. The Senate Appropriations Committee on PreK-12 Education will consider [SB 206](#) to expand training incentives for teachers of students with autism, as well as [SB 124](#) revising Florida Virtual School admissions and [SB 420](#) requiring portraits of George Washington and Abraham Lincoln in K-5 and social studies classrooms.

The Senate Appropriations Committee on Higher Education will also hear [SB 176](#) on postsecondary safety policies and [SB 816](#) establishing the UF Diabetes Institute, alongside confirmation hearings for college and university trustees.

Board Set to Decide on H-1B Visa Faculty Ban

The Florida Board of Governors voted on a one-year ban preventing public universities from hiring new faculty on H-1B visas, which are commonly used to recruit highly specialized international talent when no qualified U.S. applicants are available. The moratorium will last through January 5, 2027, and would not affect the roughly 400 H-1B visa holders already employed at Florida universities. The move aligns with Governor Ron DeSantis' push to stop universities from using the visas, arguing they displace American workers. Faculty critics warn the ban would severely harm science and technical departments that rely on global expertise, noting that qualified domestic candidates are often unavailable in niche research fields. Texas implemented a similar freeze earlier this week.

Florida Joins Federal School Choice Tax Credit Program

Florida will participate in a new federal school-choice tax credit program that begins January 1, 2027, allowing parents to receive up to \$1,700 in scholarships for K-12 public, private, or charter school expenses. Created under the One Big Beautiful Bill Act, the Federal Education Freedom Tax Credit gives taxpayers a dollar-for-dollar federal income-tax reduction for contributions to approved scholarship-granting organizations, which then distribute funds for tuition, tutoring, supplies, and disability-related services.

Florida, one of 24 states opting in, already has about 1.4 million students in school-choice programs. Scholarships will be available to families earning up to 300% of their area's median income; with Florida's median household income around \$76,000, many middle-income families would qualify. Most scholarships in the state are expected to be administered through Step Up For Students.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND LAW ENFORCEMENT

'Jason Raynor Act' Ready for House Floor

A Senate committee has advanced [SB 156](#), the Senate companion to [HB 17](#), as lawmakers continue pushing a broad package tightening Florida's arrest laws and significantly increasing penalties for killing law enforcement officers. The bill has drawn new scrutiny after ICE officers fatally shot a protester in Minnesota, intensifying concerns about provisions that remove existing statutory language stating officers are not justified in using force if they know an arrest is unlawful. Defense attorneys and Democratic lawmakers warned that eliminating that safeguard is dangerous, especially alongside another section stating defendants cannot resist arrest, even if they believe it is unlawful, so long as the officer acted in good faith.

Both SB 156 and HB 17 are branded the "Officer Jason Raynor Act," named after a Daytona Beach officer killed in 2021. The House version, which passed the Judiciary Committee 20-1, would mandate life without parole for anyone convicted of manslaughter in an officer's death—a response to the shooter in Raynor's case being convicted of manslaughter rather than murder. The legislation also expands who qualifies as a protected officer, increases penalties for assaults and batteries on officers, and codifies a "good faith" standard for evaluating police conduct during arrests. Representative Dotie Joseph cast the lone no vote in the House,

warning the bill could restrict lawful resistance in cases of misconduct. Supporters argue the package is needed to address rising violence and eroding trust in law enforcement. Senate Bill 156 has now cleared the Senate Rules Committee and passed in the full Senate, while HB 17 is ready for House floor consideration.

Domestic Violence Overhaul Clears First House Panel

A bipartisan bill to strengthen Florida's domestic and dating violence laws, [HB 277](#), unanimously passed its first House committee. Sponsored by Representatives Debra Tendrich and Danny Nix, the measure increases penalties for repeated violations of protective injunctions, allowing charges to escalate to higher-degree felonies and even a life felony during a state of emergency. It also sets minimum jail terms for certain offenses, requires electronic monitoring in high-risk cases, expands the definition of domestic violence, and mandates lethality assessments, body-camera use, and specialized training for first responders.

The bill further directs 911 systems to flag addresses with prior domestic-violence calls, raises relocation assistance for victims from \$1,500 to \$2,500, and adds questions about threats to pets in injunction petitions. Tendrich and survivors who testified emphasized that leaving an abuser is often the most dangerous moment, citing data showing 497 domestic-violence homicides in Florida from 2022–2024. A Senate companion, [SB 682](#), is also advancing with unanimous support.

Streamlining the Bail System

A House panel unanimously advanced [HB 1017](#), a bill to streamline Florida's bail laws and strengthen accountability for both defendants and bail bond agents. Sponsored by Representative Jessica Baker, the proposal rewrites complex statutes that have produced inconsistent court rulings and clarifies how courts and bond agents must respond when defendants miss court or violate release terms. It removes non-monetary bail options for defendants who fail to appear and sets clearer timelines and standards for bond forfeiture.

The bill also tightens regulation of the bail industry by requiring in-person training, banning virtual offices, defining permissible fees, and prohibiting overnight solicitation. Supported by the bail bond industry, the measure has one committee stop remaining. Its Senate companion, [SB 600](#), is set for a Feb. 2 hearing.

HEALTH CARE

Drug Prices

The House Budget Committee voted 27–2 to advance [HB 697](#), a proposal to curb prescription drug costs by capping prices through a "most-favored-nation" model that compares Florida drug prices to those in select foreign countries. Sponsor Representative Jennifer Kincart Jonsson argued that Americans pay far more than consumers abroad and said the bill would help rein in inflated costs. Pharmaceutical industry groups strongly objected, warning that state-level price controls could disrupt the national supply chain and lead to shortages. PhRMA lobbyist Sharon Lamberton called the measure a harmful "price control bill" that could limit patient access to medications. HB 697 still has one more committee stop before reaching the House floor. Its Senate companion, [SB 1158](#), has been filed but has not yet been heard.

HIV/AIDS Drug Program

Advocates are asking an administrative court to halt major changes the DeSantis administration is making to Florida's Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program, warning the revisions could cut off coverage for more than 16,000 low-income patients and limit access to essential HIV medications. The AIDS Healthcare Foundation argues the Department of Health illegally implemented the changes without required rulemaking and is seeking a fast-tracked ruling before the new standards take effect March 1.

Florida has long allowed eligibility up to 400% of the federal poverty level, but DOH has begun notifying patients that the threshold is dropping to 130%, meaning many will lose insurance premium assistance and medication support by February 28. Some patients have also been told they will no longer receive Biktarvy, a widely used HIV treatment. DOH says the cuts are necessary due to rising insurance costs, stagnant federal funding, and a projected \$120 million shortfall. Advocates counter that the changes will disrupt treatment, increase HIV transmission, and worsen health outcomes statewide.

TRANSPORTATION

Immigrant Truck Drivers

A Florida Senate committee advanced [SB 86](#), a bill requiring law enforcement to arrest commercial truck drivers found to be in the country illegally and to seize their trucks. Owners would have to pay a \$50,000 civil penalty to reclaim the vehicle. The proposal responds to an August Florida Turnpike crash in St. Lucie County that killed three people; the driver, Harjinder Singh, had entered the U.S. illegally in 2018, later received a work permit and a California CDL, and now faces vehicular homicide and manslaughter charges. Sponsored by Senator Don Gaetz, the bill passed the Senate Transportation Committee 6-3 and still has two committee stops. The House companion bill, [HB 1247](#), has not yet been heard.

E-Bike Speed Limit and Safety Task Force

A Senate committee unanimously advanced [SB 382](#), which would set a 10-mph speed limit for electric bicycles on shared paths or sidewalks not adjacent to roads when pedestrians are within 50 feet. The bill also creates an Electric Bicycle Safety Task Force to study and recommend ways to reduce e-bike injuries and fatalities. After clearing the Senate Transportation, Tourism, and Economic Development Committee, the measure now heads to the Fiscal Policy Committee.

CULTURE AND SYMBOLS

Donald J. Trump Airport

Palm Beach International Airport could be renamed Donald J. Trump International Airport under [SB 706](#), which cleared the Senate Transportation Committee. The change would require FAA approval and a county agreement allowing commercial use of Trump's name. The bill also shifts authority for naming major Florida airports to the state. It now heads to the Senate Community Affairs Committee

West Bank Name Ban Advances in House

A House committee advanced [HB 31](#), which would require Florida government agencies and school materials to use the historical Jewish names “Judea” and “Samaria” instead of “West Bank” when referring to the area west of the Jordan River. The Senate companion, [SB 1106](#), cleared its first committee a day earlier. Supporters frame the change as part of a broader national pro-Israel effort and argue the traditional names reflect Jewish historical ties to the region. Co-sponsor Representative Debra Tendrich said the term “West Bank” was adopted to diminish that connection. Opponents, including Representatives Angie Nixon and Anna Eskamani, warned the mandate could be viewed as erasing Palestinians, who make up the majority of the area’s population. The bill is now ready for House floor consideration.

ECONOMY

Florida, Germany Formalize Economic Cooperation Agreement

Florida and Germany have signed a Joint Declaration of Intent to expand economic and technological cooperation, building on Florida’s 2025 leadership mission to Germany. The agreement outlines collaboration in areas like advanced technologies, aerospace, manufacturing, life sciences and workforce training. Governor Ron DeSantis said the partnership will strengthen Florida’s economic position, while German Ambassador Jens Hanefeld highlighted expected benefits such as job growth and innovation. Germany was Florida’s seventh-largest trading partner in 2024, with more than \$12 billion in trade and a sharp increase in Florida exports.

State Unemployment Rate Ticks Up to 4.3% in December

Florida’s unemployment rate rose to 4.3% in December, continuing a gradual uptick as lawmakers debate proposals to tighten eligibility for jobless benefits. The Florida Department of Commerce reported Friday that the state unemployment rate increased 0.1% last month from 4.2% in November, following earlier climbs from 3.9% in September and 3.8% in August. Unemployment had held steady at 3.7% from April through July. An October rate was not issued due to a federal government shutdown. “There were 486,000 jobless Floridians out of a labor force of 11,225,000,” reads the Florida Commerce press release. “The U.S. seasonally adjusted unemployment rate was 4.4 percent in December.”

BUSINESS

Vape Marketing

The Senate Regulated Industries Committee unanimously advanced [SB 980](#), the “Florida Age-Gate Act,” which would tighten advertising and display rules for non-FDA-authorized e-cigarettes and nicotine vapes. The bill bans open displays in convenience stores and gas stations and creates escalating penalties, starting with a \$500–\$1,000 fine, a 7-day permit suspension, and required corrective action; a third violation within 12 weeks becomes a second-degree misdemeanor. Fine revenue would fund FDLE staffing, investigations, and public awareness campaigns. FDA-authorized products would be exempt. Senators acknowledged industry concerns about unintended consequences, including the potential for more illegal imports, but sponsor Senator Alexis Calatayud argued the bill is needed to protect minors and avoid costly enforcement. The measure has two committee stops remaining. The House companion, [HB 843](#), has not yet been heard.

IMMIGRATION

Orlando Protester Arrested After Confrontation at ICE Facility

A 23-year-old woman, Alexis Brianna Clark, was arrested outside the ICE Enforcement and Removal Operations facility in Orlando after allegedly blocking a federal vehicle and striking its mirror and door. She was charged with assaulting and resisting an officer without violence and held on \$1,000 bond. The Orange County Sheriff's Office said the rest of the protest was peaceful. The incident reflects ongoing tensions between immigration protesters and federal agents, echoing recent clashes in Minneapolis and other arrests in Florida tied to immigration-enforcement demonstrations.

Judge Orders State to Release Records on Everglades Detention Center

A Leon County judge has ordered Florida's Division of Emergency Management to release all communications with federal officials about the creation and operation of the state's controversial Everglades migrant detention center. The ruling requires the agency to fully comply with public-records requests from Friends of the Everglades by mid-February, covering emails, texts, and other documents related to the decision to use the Dade-Collier airport site, the facility's operations, and any federal grant activity. The center, nicknamed "Alligator Alcatraz", can hold 3,000 migrants and has processed about 20,000 people in six months, drawing criticism from environmental groups, the Miccosukee Tribe, Democrats, and humanitarian organizations. Courts have rejected claims of mistreatment or improper limits on legislative access. The state initially argued the project had no federal ties, but later acknowledged applying for a FEMA reimbursement grant; FEMA awarded \$608.4 million in October. Friends of the Everglades says more records exist beyond the single-page grant document the state released and is seeking a finding of a public-records violation.

ENVIRONMENT

Panel Backs Cattle Grazing Consideration on Conservation Lands

A House panel approved [HB 1421](#), a bill requiring managers of state-owned conservation lands, including parks, to evaluate whether areas are "suitable" for cattle grazing when updating land management plans. If land is deemed suitable, it must be offered for grazing leases; if not, agencies must explain why.

Democrats and environmental groups raised concerns about how "suitability" would be defined and warned the policy could harm sensitive habitats. Supporters argued grazing can reduce maintenance costs by replacing taxpayer-funded mowing and support Florida's cattle industry. Critics said the bill needs stronger safeguards to protect water quality, public access, and conservation goals.

Five state parks already allow grazing, and several water management districts lease land for it. The bill passed 16-2 and has one committee stop remaining. A matching Senate bill, [SB 1658](#), has also been filed.

2026 SESSION BILL STATISTICS

As of January 30

Senate		
	Filed	Passed Senate
General Bills	865	23
Local Bills	8	0
House		
	Filed	Passed House
General Bills	794	8
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 February 2-6, 2026](#)

Senate Calendar

- [Weekly Schedule of Senate Meeting Time Allocations for February 2-6, 2026](#)
- [Weekly Schedule of Senate Meeting Time Allocations for February 9-13, 2026](#)