

The LaMarca Letter !

2021 Legislative Session Update:

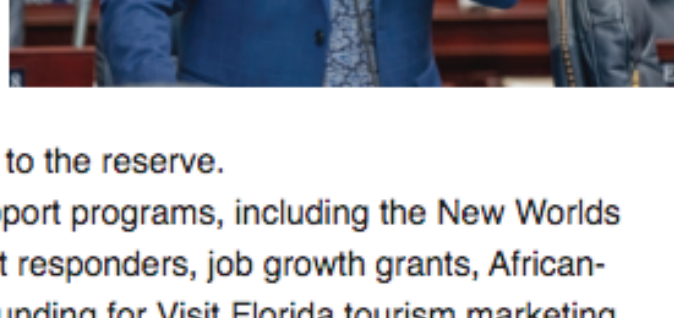


As we prepare for legislative committee weeks throughout the remainder of the year and prepare for the 2022 legislative session in January, I am pleased to share some news about our District 93 team. Samantha Verner (Samantha.Verner@myfloridahouse.gov) is now my Legislative Assistant and Natalie Martinez (Natalie.Martinez@myfloridahouse.gov) is my District Secretary. Please feel free to save their email addresses for any questions or concerns in Tallahassee or here in our beautiful district.

Now for the highlights from the 2021 legislative session. We passed a monumental \$101.5 billion budget, which includes a significant amount of Federal COVID-19 Relief funding. The budget leaves a historic \$6 billion in reserves to ensure that Florida is always prepared for a better tomorrow. Please see details and a review of policy below.

Budget Highlights:

- \$3.1 billion for state infrastructure, including our State Highway System; seaports; deferred maintenance for state facilities; education construction projects; a new state Emergency Operations Center; IT systems for reemployment and workforce development; and new armories.
- \$1.8 billion for environmental programs, including Resilient Florida Grants, septic-to-sewer grants, beaches, coastal mapping, water quality initiatives, the closure of Piney Pointe, and Everglades restoration.
- \$1 billion to fund a new Emergency Preparedness & Response Fund, in addition to the reserve.
- \$438 million for education and economic support programs, including the New Worlds Reading Initiative, bonuses for pandemic first responders, job growth grants, African-American Cultural and Historic Grants, and funding for Visit Florida tourism marketing.
- \$350 million to increase the Budget Stabilization Fund.



Pre-K & K-12 Education:

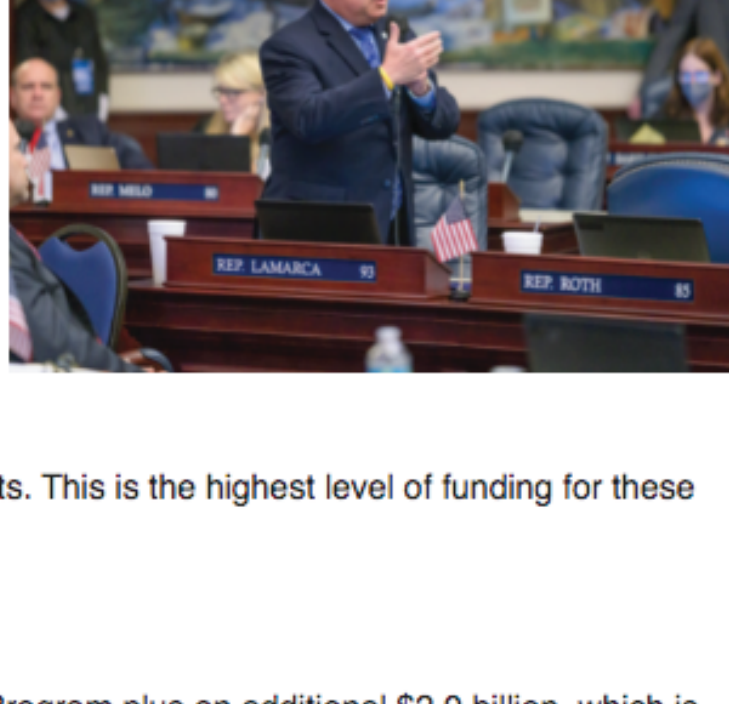
- \$22.8 billion total funds for the Florida Education Finance Program. This provides an increase in total FEFP of \$315.2 million, including \$464.3 million appropriated in a new Student Reserve Allocation.
- \$4,372.91 per student funding, a \$53.42 increase in base student funding.
- \$50 million increase (for a total of \$550 million) in the Teacher Salary Increase Allocation to support all school districts as they seek to attain a minimum base salary of \$47,500 for all full-time classroom teachers in Florida.
- \$1.8 billion of federal stimulus funds for public schools to continue to stay open, enroll students, and remediate learning loss for students.
- \$166.2 million of federal stimulus funds to provide bonuses to early learning instructors.

Higher Education:

- \$200 million for the New Worlds Reading Initiative to provide books and support to struggling readers.
- \$25 million for College Performance Increases.
- Tuition and fees, as well as funding for need-based financial aid, are held constant at current levels to ensure higher education is affordable for Floridians.

Agriculture & Natural Resources:

- \$2.1 billion for Everglades restoration and protection of Florida's water resources including projects for Everglades restoration, springs, storm water and wastewater grants, and the Resilient Florida Grant Program.
- \$402 million for Florida Forever for acquisition of conservation lands.
- \$150 million for Beach Restoration Projects. This is the highest level of funding for these projects in history.
- \$100 million for Piney Point disaster cleanup and remediation.
- \$50.7 million for State Park Improvements. This is the highest level of funding for these projects in history.



Infrastructure & Tourism:

- \$9.2 billion for the Transportation Work Program plus an additional \$2.0 billion, which is contingent on receipt of federal stimulus funds to backfill lost revenue to keep state infrastructure going.
- Repeated the controversial M-CORES toll roads in Central Florida to reinvest in existing arterial highways.

Health Care:

- \$4.3 billion (\$1.2 billion General Revenue) to fund the Medicaid Price Level and Workload. The funds will serve an anticipated 4.8 million beneficiaries with no reductions to eligibility groups or services.
- \$239.8 million (\$89.2 million general revenue) to extend postpartum Medicaid-eligibility of pregnant women from 60 days following birth to 12 months following birth. This will help 97,600 mothers maintain their coverage and ensure a healthy start for their babies.
- \$9 million for Minority Health Equity Planning to reduce minority morbidity and mortality in the priority areas of HIV/AIDS, chronic diseases, and infant mortality to combat health disparities.

Bills Passed:

Sales Tax Holidays:

FREEWEEK WEEK SALES TAX HOLIDAY

Seven-day recreation sales tax holiday, from July 1 through July 7, on:

- Admissions to museums, live music events, live sporting events, cultural events, theaters, and state parks (for use or events scheduled to be held before the end of the year)
- Fitness facility dues and fees (from July 1 through the end of the year)

Also included are outdoor recreation items (under certain dollar amounts):

- Boating/water sports (canoes, water skis, paddleboards, snorkels, masks, life jackets, inflatable tubes, etc.)
- Camping supplies (collapsible chairs, sleeping bags, binoculars, tents, etc.)
- Fishing supplies (rods, reels, bait, tackle, etc.)
- General outdoor supplies (outdoor grills, bicycles, sunscreen, insect repellent, water bottles, etc.)

BACK-TO-SCHOOL SALES TAX HOLIDAY

Ten days, from July 31 through August 9, on:

- Clothing items priced \$60 or less
- School supplies priced \$15 or less
- The first \$1000 of personal computers and related accessories

DISASTER PREPAREDNESS SALES TAX HOLIDAY

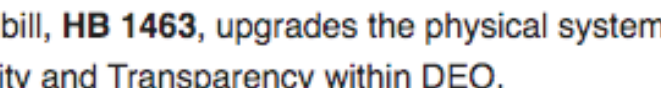
Ten days, from May 28 through June 6:

- Disaster preparedness supplies (e.g. flashlights, radios, batteries, food storage coolers)
- Generators priced at \$1000 or less

Governor DeSantis has already signed **SB 50:**

Online Sales Tax.

I am proud to have signed **SB 50:** Online Sales Tax. I am proud to have been a sponsor of this bill with Representative Clemons to protect our brick-and-mortar retailers. Additional revenue collected will be used to replenish the Unemployment Compensation Trust Fund to prevent a more than 700 percent tax hike on our hard-working businesses. Once the trust fund is replenished the additional state revenue will be used to lower the sales tax on commercial rent by 275 percent (from 5.5 percent to 2.0 percent.) I will continue to fight to protect our local businesses from government overreach and over taxation.



Unemployment:

I made a commitment during my last campaign and that commitment became my legislative priority this year - fixing our broken unemployment system. During the beginning of the pandemic, thousands of people were unable to get into the unemployment system. Now, DEO will now be required to implement an integrated modular system, to ensure the system can support any future influx of claims that come in. My bill, **HB 1463**, upgrades the physical system and establishes the Office of Economic Accountability and Transparency within DEO.

HB 1463**DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY**

REPRESENTATIVE LAMARCA

HB 1463 modernizes and improves efficiency, effectiveness, and accountability relating to the reemployment assistance system.

MAJOR MESSAGES

- Moves the Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO) CONNECT system to a cloud-based, modular system to ensure the system is always there when Floridians need it.
- Establishes an Office of Economic Accountability and Transparency within DEO to improve efficiency, accountability, and public messaging.

Education:

This year the Florida Legislature made childhood literacy a priority and created the **RAISE Program**, which identifies schools with low reading performance and provides them instructional planning, professional development, and other tools needed to improve student literacy. HB 7011 also increases parental involvement by enhancing communication between schools and parents, empowering parents to help advance their child's literacy skills.

Reading plays an irreplaceable role throughout a child's development and is one of the cornerstones for a promising future.

We can better educate our youth by encouraging literacy-rich environments at home. **HB 3** invests in our children by creating Florida's first statewide, free book distribution program and empowering parents to engage with their children's reading activities. Free books will be delivered to struggling K-5 readers each month within this school year, giving children the option to choose book genres and topics they want to read most, and providing parents with resources to help their child's reading skills and instill a love of reading.

Level 2 EMERGING READERS Ages 2-4 EMERGING READERS Ages 5-8 INTERMEDIATE READERS Ages 9-12 INDEPENDENT READERS Ages 13-12 SENIOR READERS

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Florida is at the forefront of the school choice movement, championing opportunities that empower families to decide what type of education best meets their child's individual needs. We created more school choice opportunities by improving and expanding our state's scholarship programs to benefit Florida families. It will also be easier for parents to navigate the school choice system by creating a school choice program to serve low-income students and students with disabilities. It combines the Gardiner (GSP) and McKay Scholarships, and moves them under the Family Empowerment Scholarship (FES) - creating one program to serve low-income students and students with disabilities.

To further benefit Florida families, HB 7045 increases the scholarship amount for Florida Tax Credit (FTC), Hope and FES students so that they receive the full amount they would generate in the public school system. The bill also allows the following students to enroll, regardless of program capacity: foster children, adopted children, children of active-duty military families, and students who attended a public school in the year prior if they are low-income or are a student with a disability.

School Safety:

I am happy to have sponsored the legislation that improves transparency around school safety and security, addresses student mental health, and clarifies juvenile diversion policies. District and charter school boards will adopt a plan to guide family unification during natural or manmade disasters and creates a parental right to timely notification of emergencies, threats and unlawful incidents.



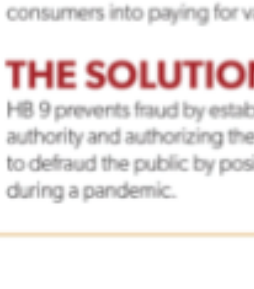
The bill also requires school safety officers to complete mental health intervention training and clarifies what acts would refer a student to law enforcement for civil citation or similar prearrest diversion program or assign a student to a school-based intervention program.

Sea Level Rise & Flooding:

From storm surge and tidal flooding to groundwater and flash flooding, the effects are felt across our state in both coastal and inland communities. Our new **Statewide Flooding and Sea Level Rise Resilience** plan dedicates \$100 million each year to mitigate the impacts of flooding and sea level rise that would damage our homes, disrupt businesses, and displace families and employees. It also creates a statewide resiliency grant program to provide funding to local governments to cover the costs of community resilience planning.

Homeowners that take proactive measures to protect their property from flooding should not only be rewarded, but these actions should be incentivized. **HJR 1377** encourages homeowners to take the steps necessary to protect their homes and their families from the disastrous impacts of flooding by offering tax breaks to those who voluntarily elevate their property. This proposed constitutional amendment exempts the added value to the property from the elevation from property tax assessments.

COVID-19 Protections:



PROTECTING CONSUMERS AGAINST FRAUD DURING THE COVID PANDEMIC

HB 9 establishes criminal penalties and authorizes civil remedies to protect Floridians from fraud as they seek to get vaccinated during a pandemic.

THE SITUATION

The FBI, FTC and state and local officials have warned Florida consumers to be wary of offers to get special access to COVID-19 vaccines in exchange for money. They often use authentic-looking but fake websites to lure unsuspecting consumers into paying for vaccines or appointments that never materialize.

THE SOLUTION

HB 9 prevents fraud by establishing criminal penalties, providing prosecutorial authority and authorizing the Attorney General to seek civil remedies for attempts to defraud the public by posing to offer a COVID-19 vaccine or other vaccine during a pandemic.

Scammers are trying to use fake websites to lure unsuspecting Floridians into paying for COVID-19 vaccines, appointments, or PPE that never materialize. **HB 9** establishes criminal penalties and authorizes civil remedies to protect Floridians from fraud as they seek PPE and vaccines during a pandemic. **HB 9** will help prevent scammers from defrauding Floridians.

As always, it is a tremendous honor to serve you as your State Representative in Tallahassee.

Best Wishes,

Representative Chip LaMarca
Florida House District 93