

**FLORIDA SENATE**  **MAJORITY OFFICE**



**SENATOR WILTON SIMPSON**  
**MAJORITY LEADER**

## THIS WEEK IN THE FLORIDA SENATE

NOVEMBER 13 - 17, 2017

### **Legislation Providing Services for Veterans and Their Families Passes Committee**

The Senate Committee on Military and Veterans Affairs, Space, and Domestic Security unanimously passed Senate Bill 326, Services for Veterans and Their Families, sponsored by Senator Dana Young. Senator Young's bill establishes the Florida Veterans' Care Coordination Program within the Department of Children and Families to provide statewide dedicated behavioral healthcare referral services to Veterans and their families through Florida's 211 Network.



Florida's 211 Network is a statewide network that serves as a single point of coordination for information and referral for health and human services. The network is a telephone-based service that helps callers identify and connect with health and human service programs that can meet a variety of needs, including food, housing, employment, health care, crisis intervention, and more. This service is available statewide, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, in all of Florida's 67 counties by calling 2-1-1.

Senate Bill 326 expands to statewide a pilot program that began in 2014 by the Crisis Center of Tampa Bay and the Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs. The statewide program will use existing infrastructure to provide an easily accessible entry point for veterans and their families in need of critical services, especially in the area of suicide prevention.

The bill directs some services to be provided by a fellow Veteran and that 211 Veterans services must include: telephonic peer support, crisis intervention, communication of information and referral resources, treatment coordination and follow-up care, suicide assessment, and resource coordination for veterans programs and services.

With over 1.5 million veterans, Florida has the third largest Veteran population in the nation. Senate Bill 326 continues our state's commitment in solidifying Florida's reputation as the most veteran-friendly state in the nation.

## **Legislation Protecting Minors from Childhood Marriage Advances**

The Senate Committee on Children, Families, and Elder Affairs unanimously passed Senate Bill 140, Marriage Licenses, sponsored by Senator Lizbeth Benacquisto and cosponsored by Majority Leader Wilton Simpson, Senator Travis Hutson, and Senator Keith Perry. The bill makes it illegal to issue a marriage certificate to anyone under the age of 18 in the state of Florida.

Girls as young as 11 years old have been forced to marry adults who have taken advantage of them. Senate Bill 140 repeals the current exceptions that allow for a minor to marry with or without parental consent, when the couple has a child or is expecting a child. This legislation is part of a continuing effort to put laws in place that protect Florida's children.

## **Disaster Preparedness Tax Holiday Legislation Passes First Senate Committee**

Senate Bill 620, Disaster Preparedness Tax Exemption, sponsored by Senator Kathleen Passidomo and cosponsored by Senator Dana Young, unanimously passed the Senate Committee on Commerce and Tourism. The bill proposes a 10-day (June 1-10, 2018) sales tax holiday making certain items relating to disaster preparedness and protection tax exempt.

The Disaster Preparedness Tax Holiday would coincide with the beginning of hurricane season beginning on June 1, and provide Floridians with cost savings on vital disaster preparedness items that can help protect their families and homes in the event of a hurricane or other disaster. During the tax exempt period, under specified maximum values, the following items will be exempt from state sales and use tax, and county discretionary sales surtaxes: certain light sources, radios, tarps, "tie-down" kits, fuel tanks, batteries, cellular telephone chargers, food storage coolers, portable generators, storm shutter devices, carbon monoxide detectors, reusable ice, personal locator beacons, and emergency position-indicating radio beacons.

The 2017 hurricane season proved to be extremely busy and produced several named hurricanes, including Hurricane Irma, which greatly impacted the state of Florida. In addition to creating a family disaster plan, Floridians would be encouraged to take advantage of this sales tax holiday and stock up on essential disaster preparedness items.

## **Senate Committees Continue Discussions Related to Hurricane Impacts on the State**

Several Senate committees continued discussions regarding the impacts that this year's hurricanes have had on the state of Florida. Listed below are the topics that were discussed.

- Senate Committee on Education heard a presentation from the Department of Education relating to K-20 education entities' emergency responses.
- Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation, Tourism, and Economic Development discussed the impacts Hurricane Irma had on state infrastructure.
- Appropriations Subcommittee on General Government heard presentations regarding utility infrastructure and continuity of state operations following the aftermath of the hurricanes.
- Senate Committee on Military and Veterans Affairs, Space, and Domestic Security heard a presentation by the Division of Emergency Management regarding the State Logistics Response Center (SLRC) and reviewed the findings of the Inspector General's audit report of the SLRC.

Video archives of these and all Senate committee meetings from this week can be viewed online via: <http://www.flsenate.gov/Media/Videos>.

## **Happy Thanksgiving!**

As we prepare to celebrate the Thanksgiving holiday with family, friends, and loved ones, let us take time to reflect and count our many blessings.



We are also thankful for our service members who sacrifice so much to protect our liberties and we keep in mind our military families, as many of them are waiting for a loved one to return home. We are forever grateful to our nation's heroes for their bravery, dedication, and selflessness.

It is with great hope that we continue to look to the future, foster gratitude in our hearts, and maintain a love and respect for all. Happy Thanksgiving!