



2015 LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

From State Senator

Audrey Gibson



Dear Constituent and Friend,

Session 2015 and Special Session A are in the history books. Our biggest battle this year was healthcare funding, a critical area where my colleagues and I in the Senate passed the Florida Health Insurance Exchange, or FHIX, which would have expanded access to health insurance coverage to nearly one million Floridians. Our health delivery system continues to be an issue that deserves our immediate attention and now we must begin to plan for next year to maximize federal match dollars.

I am pleased that through it all SB 378 - Juvenile Justice, bipartisan legislation I filed with Senator Rene Garcia (R) Miami-Dade, relating to juvenile civil citations, was passed and signed by the Governor. This bill helps us to turn around the risky behavior of our young people and put them on the path to success.

Additionally, funding for UF Health Jacksonville and other safety net hospitals that provide medical treatment to the uninsured, was saved, although the House rejected the Senate's bipartisan FHIX plan, resulting in more of our budget dollars being placed in the Low Income Pool (LIP) pot, to send to hospitals, rather than provision of actual health coverage for the working poor.

In this newsletter are brief synopses of legislation I thought would be of particular interest to you and your family.

If you would like further information about any of the referenced bills, or other legislative matters, please do not hesitate to contact my office.

As always it is an honor and a pleasure to serve you in the Florida Senate!

Sincerely,

Audrey Gibson
State Senator
District 9



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COMMITTEES

- Criminal Justice, Vice Chair
- Military and Veterans Affairs, Space, and Domestic Security, Vice Chair
- Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation, Tourism, and Economic Development
- Communications, Energy, and Public Utilities
- Rules
- Joint Legislative Auditing Committee

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★ ★ SENATOR AUDREY GIBSON 2015 LEGISLATIVE UPDATE ★ ★



IT IS AN HONOR AND PLEASURE TO SERVE YOU IN THE FLORIDA SENATE!



LEGISLATIVE UPDATE • FROM STATE SENATOR AUDREY GIBSON



Our 2015-16 State Budget

The Senate and House debated and passed a **\$79 billion dollar budget**. I fought for issues in the budget that directly impact our district. Among these were: Cecil Spaceport Landside Infrastructure, to help develop basic infrastructure for space-related projects; Children of Inmates, Inc. Duval County, to help children of inmates rebuild their lives through care coordination and referral services; 5000 Role Models of Excellence Project for Duval County Public Schools which is a dropout prevention and mentoring program for male students; new Town Success Zone/Children's Initiative continuation funding for wrap around services to bring positive change to neighborhoods in a distressed area; Riverside Fine Arts Association Project Listen, an educational outreach program to students primarily in schools located in disadvantaged areas; and other budget line items. Unfortunately over \$20 million in funding for critical Jacksonville issues was vetoed by the Governor.



On more positive notes, education funding received a bump for overall spending, however, per pupil spending still remains below 2008 levels; we funded nearly all cultural & historic preservation projects and programs, though we did not quite get to the full needed effort for funding of state libraries. We increased the budget allocation for the Agency for Persons with Disabilities, but didn't quite close the waiting list for those needing home and community based services. The same is true about funding for our frail and elderly persons with Alzheimer's wait list, though we did increase the overall funding.

Other priorities related to safety and security, like increasing troopers on our roads, extending economic advancement development opportunities by ensuring tax dollars are properly monitored when given as incentives, and giving flexibility in housing dollars for rent subsidies and assistance to stem the homelessness rate, are all part of our state budget, a mixture of good and not so great but worthy of my support on behalf of my constituents.



Helping Our Veterans

This year my Military and Veterans Affairs, Space, and Domestic Security committee created, and the legislature approved, SB 7028 - Educational Opportunities for Veterans. The bill amends the Congressman C.W. "Bill" Young Veteran Tuition Waiver Program to allow additional persons to be eligible for the out-of-state tuition fee waiver currently offered to honorably discharged veterans residing in Florida. The law requires the school to waive out-of-state fees for any person who is receiving educational assistance through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and who physically resides in Florida while enrolled in certain institutions. This allows individuals, such as a spouse or child of a veteran or service member using GI Bill benefits, to qualify for in-state tuition rates.

BACK TO SCHOOL SALES TAX HOLIDAY AUGUST 7-16, 2015

The back to school sale tax holiday provides a three day sale exempt on the following items:
 Clothing and Footwear, defined as articles of wearing apparel, including all footwear, except skis, swim fins, roller blades, and skates.
 Wallets, and bags including handbags, backpacks, fanny packs, and diaper bags, but excluding briefcases, suitcases, and other garment bags

Family Friendly

While I believe that passage of the Senate's health care plan for the uninsured would have afforded more meaningful tax cuts, I supported the "Taxation" bill which offers some tax relief for Florida's families and businesses.

Visit <http://www.flsenate.gov/Session/Bill/2015A/0033A/BillText/er/PDF> for a complete listing however, reductions of note are:

- Back to School Sales Tax Holiday extended to 10 days;
- Sales taxes on college textbooks eliminated for one year;
- Tax exemption on school concessions sold at sporting and other school events

Student Testing Relief

With numerous school testing issues during the past few years, the Legislature passed the Education Accountability law which reduces the number of statutorily-required assessments; reduces the amount of time devoted to testing among other reductions in testing; and requires independent verification of the validity of statewide, standardized assessments. While the bill is helpful it does not go far enough as several school districts are still experiencing testing related difficulty.

