2021 LEGISLATIVE SESSION: WEEK THREE

Dear Friends and Neighbors,

Week Three of our 2021 legislative session is now complete. Please enjoy my update below and as always, know you may reach out to my office anytime.

While vaccines are continuing to be provided, I still encourage you to continue practicing social distancing and safety measures such as washing your hands often. Stay well and healthy.

Our Tallahassee line is 850.487.5031 and my email is Berman.Lori.Web@flsenate.gov.

Happy Spring!

Lori

IMPORTANT VACCINE UPDATES

The age of eligibility for vaccines was officially lowered to 50+ this past Monday, 3/22. For those who are homebound and need a vaccine, email HomeboundVaccine@em.myflorida.com with your name and phone number to put in your request. The Florida Department of Emergency Management (FDEM) will contact you within 72 hours to collect more information & schedule your appointment.
Bill Action Update

SB 224: Sales Tax Exemption
Heard in the Senate Children, Families, and Elder Affairs Committee last week, SB 224 passed unanimously. Its next stop is the Finance and Tax Committee. This bill provides exemptions for seniors from sales tax on certain items that encourage independent living, including bed transfer handles, bed rails, grab bars, and shower seats, to improve quality of life and allow our seniors to “age in place”.

SB 1070: Estates and Trusts
This bill creates the “Florida Uniform Directed Trust Act” addressing trusts that grant a trust administration power to a person other than a trustee, and create the “Community Property Trust Act” that allows spouses to transfer property into a Florida Community Property Trust. The bill is on the agenda for the Senate Judiciary Committee on Monday, 3/22.

SB 196: Lactation Spaces in Courthouses
This bill requires county courthouses to have a designated space for women to breastfeed. It will be heard in the Senate Governmental Oversight and Accountability Committee on Wednesday, 3/24.
LEGISLATION OF CONCERN

**SB 72: Civil Liability for Damages Relating to COVID-19**

The bill provides for civil liability protections from COVID-19 related lawsuits to individuals, business, governmental entities, health care institutions and providers as well as other organizations that have "substantially" complied with public health guidelines. The proposal provides blanket immunity, without fully considering protections for employees. SB 72 cleared the Senate Floor on Thursday with an almost party-line vote. The bill was added to the House Floor Calendar for 3/25/2021. If signed into law, it would take effect immediately and apply retroactively.

I voted against this legislation as, among other reasons, I have concerns that plaintiffs who may have lost a loved one, particularly in a health care setting, have no recourse in settling their matter.

**SB 582: Parental Rights**

The bill has shown up several times in many iterations over the past decade. SB 582 mandates parental consent for all medicines
administered to a child including birth control and hormones. The bill also provides that opt-in instead of opt-out policy for sexual education. This bill is on the committee agenda for its second committee of three, Education, and is scheduled to be heard 3/23. Its House companion bill is in its last committee but has not been put on the agenda yet.

As I have seen and heard this bill many times in my legislative career, I remain worried that legislation like SB 582 creates barriers, particularly to our youth, in seeking information and/or services, especially when it comes to reproductive and personal health. Studies have repeatedly shown young people are less likely to access much-needed services if their privacy is not protected. This legislation amplifies the wrong message that all children have supportive and open parents. We know that not all of our youth necessarily have this relationship with a parent, or even have a parent in their lives. These false notions should be rejected. I will be sure to vote no on the bill once again as I do not want to see young people bear the consequences or lack the services and help they may need for fear of a parent. Young people should be developing skills for adulthood, including being given the opportunity to make confidential, independent decisions affecting their health and well-being.

CARES Food Cards

As a reminder, Palm Beach County residents who qualified for pre-paid debit cards through the CARES ACT funding for food purchases must activate their cards by March 31, 2021.

Cards not activated by March 31, 2021 will expire, and the funds will be swept and redirected to fund other identified needs caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Cardholders are encouraged to activate their pre-paid debit cards for food assistance prior to the expiration date.

For more information, call the CSD’s Contact Center at (561) 355-4792.

All the best,

Lori Berman
State Senator, District 31