

The Florida Senate
BILL ANALYSIS AND FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT

(This document is based on the provisions contained in the legislation as of the latest date listed below.)

Prepared By: The Professional Staff of the Committee on Military and Veterans Affairs, Space, and Domestic Security

BILL: SB 1312

INTRODUCER: Senator Torres

SUBJECT: Tuskegee Airmen Commemoration Day

DATE: January 19, 2024

REVISED: _____

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	<u>Brown</u>	<u>Proctor</u>	<u>MS</u>	Favorable
2.	_____	_____	<u>GO</u>	_____
3.	_____	_____	<u>RC</u>	_____

I. Summary:

SB 1312 designates as a legal holiday, Tuskegee Airmen Commemoration Day. The holiday is to be held the fourth Thursday in March.

The bill takes effect July 1, 2024.

II. Present Situation:

United States War Department’s Civilian Pilot Training Program (CPTP)

In anticipation of international conflict, in the 1930’s a number of European countries (notably Germany and Italy¹) bolstered their air force through offering civilians schooling as air pilots.² The United States responded with a similar model, the Civilian Pilot Training Program.³ Like those in Europe, the U.S. programs offered only civilian flight training, but with an underlying future military purpose. The CPTP accepted its first students in 1938.

Although the Army began to rapidly increase its own pool of Army-trained pilots under the threat of war, it could not keep pace.⁴ In 1939, the Army had a total of only 4,502 pilots.⁵ These numbers grew to 8,000 in 1940 and exceeded 27,000 in 1941, but the Army could not by itself

¹ Theresa L. Kraus, FAA Historian, Federal Aviation Administration, *The CAA Helps America Prepare for World War II*, available at https://www.faa.gov/sites/faa.gov/files/about/history/milestones/The_CAA_Helps_America_Prepare_for_World_WarII.pdf (last visited Jan. 12, 2024).

² National Museum of the U.S. Air Force, *Civilian Pilot Training Program*, available at <https://www.nationalmuseum.af.mil/Visit/Museum-Exhibits/Fact-Sheets/Display/Article/196137/civilian-pilot-training-program/> (last visited Jan. 12, 2024).

³ *Id.*

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ *Id.*

train the vast numbers of pilots needed in those years.⁶ The CPTP filled this gap by greatly subsidizing the pool of air pilots required to engage in wartime activities.⁷

In addition to boosting the population of qualified military pilots, the CPTP provided African Americans and women uncharted opportunity previously denied to them in aviation. “Pioneering black fliers campaigned hard for public awareness of their abilities, and their efforts paid off with an antidiscrimination rule” in the implementation of the CPTP.⁸

Federally funded, the CPTP recruited students through colleges and universities, six of which were historically black colleges (HBCs).⁹ The Tuskegee Institute, in Macon County, Alabama was one of the six participating HBCs.¹⁰ The CPTP at the HBCs significantly increased the numbers of African American civilian pilots, but they continued to be excluded from aviation duty in the military.¹¹ A NAACP challenge, combined with other pressures, resulted in the decision of the War Department in June 1941 to establish one segregated flying unit.¹² This unit came to be known as the 99th Pursuit Squadron, subsequently designated in May 1942 as the 99th Fighter Squadron at Tuskegee Army Air Field.¹³

Tuskegee Institute at Macon County, Alabama

In June of 1941, the War Department granted a contract for primary flight training to the Tuskegee Institute, which was applied to greatly expanding its aviation program, hiring more civilian instructors, and building its own civilian airfield dedicated as Moton Field in 1943 in memory of the Tuskegee Institute’s second president.¹⁴ The first class of cadets transferred from Moton Field to Tuskegee Army Air Field for the second phase of their flight training in early November 1941.¹⁵ Following the December 7, 1941, attack on Pearl Harbor, the War Department funded additional segregated aviation units at Tuskegee Army Air Field.¹⁶

Tuskegee Airmen

All told, Tuskegee Institute graduated nearly 1,000 pilots from its Airmen program¹⁷, with the first group graduating March 7, 1942.¹⁸ Of these, 352 became Tuskegee Airmen, known as the “Red Tails” because of the distinctive red tails painted on their fighter planes deployed

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ Encyclopedia of Alabama, *History, 1929-1945, The Great Depression and WWII, Tuskegee Flight Training Program*, available at <https://encyclopediaofalabama.org/article/tuskegee-flight-training-program/> (last visited Jan. 12, 2024).

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² *Id.*

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ *Id.*

¹⁷ Tuskegee University, *Tuskegee, Tuskegee Experience*, available at [https://www.tuskegee.edu/Content/Uploads/Tuskegee/files/TuskegeeExperience\(1\).pdf](https://www.tuskegee.edu/Content/Uploads/Tuskegee/files/TuskegeeExperience(1).pdf) (last visited Jan. 12, 2024).

¹⁸ Encyclopedia of Alabama, *supra* note 9 at 6.

overseas.¹⁹ During World War II (WWII) the Tuskegee Airmen flew more than 1,800 missions, including 351 missions to successfully protect bomber airplanes in the sky. They additionally shot down 112 enemy airplanes. Of the 352 airmen in overseas deployment, 32 were taken as prisoners of war²⁰, and 84 died.²¹

Combat Awards and Medals

Tuskegee Airmen have come to be known for their aviation skill, bravery, and role in breaking down racial barriers.

Tuskegee Airmen collectively or individually received the:

- Distinguished Flying Cross;
- Air Medal;
- Bronze Star;
- Purple Heart;
- Soldier Medal;
- Silver Star;
- Legion of Merit;
- Red Star of Yugoslavia; and the
- Congressional Gold Medal.²²

The Congressional Gold Medal is the nation’s highest military award for valor, presented by the U.S. president in Congress’ name. By law, only servicemembers who distinguish themselves “through conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of life above and beyond the call of duty” are eligible.²³ Surviving Tuskegee Airmen attended the ceremony and were awarded the medal, March 29, 2007.²⁴

Notable Tuskegee Airmen and Florida

Numerous Tuskegee Airmen have a connection to Florida. The list below of notable airmen with links to the state is not exhaustive.

General Daniel “Chappie” James, Jr., born in Pensacola, rose in military ranks to become the first African-American four-star general.²⁵ Later serving in both the Korean War and the

¹⁹ Tuskegee University, *supra* note 16.

²⁰ Tuskegee Airmen, Inc., Howard Baugh Chapter, *Combat Awards & Commendations*, available at <https://www.hbc-tai.org/awards---commendations.html> (last visited Jan. 12, 2024).

²¹ NASA, *Tuskegee Airmen, Fighting to Fly*, available at <https://www.nasa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/tuskegee-element.pdf> (last visited Jan. 12, 2024).

²² Tuskegee Airmen, Inc., *supra* note 19.

²³ Dept. of Defense, *Medal of Honor*, available at <https://www.defense.gov/Multimedia/Experience/honors-for-valor/> (last visited Jan. 17, 2024).

²⁴ The White House Archives, President George Bush, *Tuskegee Airmen Congressional Gold Medal Ceremony*, Mar. 29, 2007, available at <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/infocus/veterans/tuskegee/index.html> (last visited Jan. 17, 2024).

²⁵ Chappie James Museum of Pensacola, *About Chappie*, available at <https://www.chappiejamesmuseum.org/about-chappie> (last visited Jan. 17, 2024).

Vietnam War, he subsequently held the federal position of assistant secretary deputy of defense in public affairs.²⁶ Today the Chappie James Museum honors him in Pensacola.

Charles P. Bailey, Sr., born in Punta Gorda²⁷, bears the distinction of being the first aviator from Florida to become a Tuskegee Airman pilot.²⁸ He is also known for downing two enemy aircraft.²⁹ His legacy is honored with a bronze bust of his likeness and name at the Deland Naval Air Station Museum.³⁰

Lieutenant Alvin J. Downing, born in Jacksonville, became a squadron commander, and a musician and educator in the Army Air Forces Band. After his service, he settled in St. Petersburg and Clearwater, a celebrated jazz educator and performer.³¹

Second Lieutenant Alphonso Simmons of the 100th Fighter Squadron from Jacksonville survived his downed plane to fight alongside a Yugoslavian anti-communist group before he could find his squadron. He was later killed in air combat March 3, 1945.³²

First Lieutenant James Polkinghorne, Jr., born in Pensacola, was a senior at the Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University (FAMU) when he entered the U.S. Army Air Corps, the first FAMU student to be accepted and to become a Tuskegee Airman. The flight leader of a squadron of fighter planes, he was shot down and died in combat May 5, 1944. His name is on the Tallahassee Aviation Wall of Fame inside the Tallahassee International Airport.³³

Lieutenant Daniel K. Keel, Jr., of Lake County, is one of only five triple-rated airmen, as pilot, bombardier, and navigator. A graduate of Boston Latin School with a classical education in 1941, he was studying aeronautical engineering at Northeastern University when he was drafted in 1943. He is one of three servicemembers to earn the distinction of obtaining three Aeronautical Ratings during WWII.³⁴

²⁶ *Id.*

²⁷ Deland Air Naval Museum, *Delandings, WWII Tuskegee Airmen*, available at <https://www.delandnavalairmuseum.org/newsletters/delandings-february-16.pdf> (last visited Jan. 17, 2024).

²⁸ Florida Weekly, Charlotte County edition, *Punta Gorda Heros Warbird on Display at Air Show*, available at <https://charlottecounty.floridaweekly.com/articles/punta-gorda-heros-warbird-on-display-at-air-show/> (last visited Jan. 17, 2024).

²⁹ National Museum of the United States Army, *Soldier Profiles, 1st Lt. Charles P. Bailey*, available at [National Museum of the United States Army \(thenmusa.org\)](https://www.thenmusa.org) (last visited Jan. 17, 2024).

³⁰ Deland Air Naval Museum, *supra* note 24.

³¹ Weekly Challenger, *I am Alvin J. Downing*, available at <https://theweeklychallenger.com/i%E2%80%88am-alvin-j-al-downing/> (last visited Jan. 17, 2023).

³² Caf Rise Above, *Caf Rise Above, Alphonso Simmons*, available at <https://cafriseabove.org/alphonso-simmons/> (last visited Jan. 17, 2024).

³³ Tallahassee Democrat, *FAMU honors Tuskegee Airmen Lt. James Polkinghorne, Jr. with residence hall renaming*, available at <https://www.tallahassee.com/story/news/2019/11/07/famu-honoring-tuskegee-airmen-lt-james-polkinghorne-jr-friday-residence-hall-renaming/2515654001/> (last visited Jan. 17, 2024).

³⁴ Lake and Sumter Style, *Tuskegee Airman Daniel Keel Celebrates 101st Birthday*, available at <https://pinellascf.org/news/actii-feats-service-tuskegee-airmen/>, Sept. 26, 2023 (last visited Jan. 17, 2024).

Callie Odom Gentry, of Pasco County, is a female Tuskegee Airman. She served as a stenographer at the Lockbourne Air Force Base in Ohio, which primarily housed Tuskegee Airmen. Her work included interviewing survivors after a plane crash.³⁵

Legal Holidays and Observances

Chapter 683, F.S., establishes legal holidays and special observance days. Designation of a legal holiday under ch. 683, F.S., does not mean that the day is a paid holiday. Section 110.117, F.S., sets forth the holidays that are paid holidays to be observed by all state branches and agencies.³⁶

Whenever any legal holiday falls on a Sunday, the following Monday shall be deemed a public holiday for all and any of the purposes mentioned.³⁷

Section 683.01(1), F.S., provides that the legal holidays of Florida, also declared as public holidays, are:

- Sunday, the first day of each week;
- New Year's Day, January 1;
- Birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr., January 15;
- Birthday of Robert E. Lee, January 19;
- Lincoln's Birthday, February 12;
- Susan B. Anthony's Birthday, February 15;
- Washington's Birthday, the third Monday in February;
- Good Friday;
- Pascua Florida Day, April 2;
- Confederate Memorial Day, April 26;
- Memorial Day, the last Monday in May;
- Birthday of Jefferson Davis, June 3;
- Flag Day, June 14;
- Independence Day, July 4;
- Labor Day, the first Monday in September;
- Columbus Day and Farmer's, the second Monday in October;
- Veteran's Day, November 11;
- General Election Day;
- Thanksgiving Day, the fourth Thursday in November;
- Christmas Day, December 25; and
- Shrove Tuesday, sometimes also known as "Mardi Gras", in counties where carnival associations are organized for the purpose of celebrating the same.³⁸

References in contracts made to "legal holidays" are understood to include holidays designated in s. 683.01, F.S., and others designated in law.³⁹

³⁵ Pinellas Community Foundation, *Act II – Feats of Service – The Tuskegee Airmen*, available at <https://pinellascf.org/news/actii-feats-service-tuskegee-airmen/> (last visited Jan. 17, 2024).

³⁶ Section 110.117(1), F.S.

³⁷ Section 683.01(2), F.S.

³⁸ Sections 683.01(a)-(u), F.S.

³⁹ Section 683.02, F.S.

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

SB 1312 amends s. 683.01, F.S., to designate as a legal holiday, Tuskegee Airmen Commemoration Day. The holiday is to be held the fourth Thursday in March.

The bill takes effect July 1, 2024.

IV. Constitutional Issues:**A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:**

None.

B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:

None.

C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

None.

D. State Tax or Fee Increases:

None.

E. Other Constitutional Issues:

None identified.

V. Fiscal Impact Statement:**A. Tax/Fee Issues:**

None.

B. Private Sector Impact:

None.

C. Government Sector Impact:

None.

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

None.

VII. Related Issues:

None.

VIII. Statutes Affected:

This bill substantially amends section 683.01, Florida Statutes.

IX. Additional Information:

A. Committee Substitute – Statement of Changes:

(Summarizing differences between the Committee Substitute and the prior version of the bill.)

None.

B. Amendments:

None.

This Senate Bill Analysis does not reflect the intent or official position of the bill's introducer or the Florida Senate.
