



Florida Children's Services Council

Capitol Connection

News from our State and Nation's Capitol about children and families

November 2, 2007

Special Legislative Report

The end of October brought with it a jam-packed agenda filled with a number of significant events happening in and around Florida's capitol city. Among the events were the dramatic conclusion of the legislature's property tax reform efforts in its fourth special session of the year, a second public hearing meeting of the Children and Youth Cabinet in Tampa, a public meeting of the Florida Taxation and Budget Reform Commission, and presentations from state agencies outlining their legislative budget requests for 2008-2009. The Florida Children's Services Council was on the ground, and has compiled brief summaries of these events for you in this *Capitol Connection Special Report*.

Property Tax Constitutional Amendment

Following a standoff between the Florida House and Senate on Monday over a proposed property tax constitutional amendment, House members reluctantly passed the Senate version by a 97-18 vote. House members argued that the Senate proposal didn't go far enough to cut taxes, and that it left out tax-cutting measures included in earlier drafts. The language will be placed on the Jan. 29 ballot for voter approval. In order to pass, the amendment must garner 60 percent approval.

The legislature's original "super homestead exemption" amendment was removed from the ballot after a circuit court judge ruled in September that it was misleading and inaccurate. Gov. Charlie Crist has since asked the Florida Supreme Court to drop the state's appeal to keep the original language on the ballot.

The proposed amendment to be placed on the Jan. 29 ballot includes the following:

- Save Our Homes portability, up to \$500,000 (reduced from \$1 million); includes all taxes. For homeowners who gave up their homestead already this year, the differential may still be transferred if they apply for a new homestead in the next two years.
- Doubling the \$25,000 homestead exemption, with school taxes exempt. Taxes paid to schools account for about 40 percent of a property tax bill so the "doubling" is really more like an additional \$15,000 exemption, not \$25,000.
- Tangible personal property exemption of \$25,000; includes all taxes.
- 10% cap on assessments for non-homestead property, with school taxes exempt. This limitation expires in 10 years. Voters must decide whether to reauthorize it.

The proposed amendment also requires the state to statutorily appropriate state funds annually to reimburse fiscally constrained counties for any revenue lost from this proposal.

Elements not included in the proposed amendment are:

- Exemption for new homeowners
- Low-income senior relief
- Working waterfronts relief
- Affordable housing relief
- Removing property appraisers' presumption of correctness
- Requiring all property appraisers to be elected (only Miami-Dade's is appointed)

The governor has launched a statewide campaign to promote the constitutional amendment, offering tax savings of \$12 billion over the next five years. The impact on cuts to public schools is estimated to be

anywhere from \$1.8 billion to \$3 billion over the next five years. If passed, the amendment is estimated to save the average homeowner about \$240 in the first year.

The Florida teachers union has voiced opposition to the amendment. After a call from the governor, the union agreed not to actively campaign against the amendment to allow time for the governor and legislature to work out an agreement to make up for the lost funds for schools. The AFL-CIO has also voiced concerns, stating that it will mean job losses for public employees.

Links to the proposal language and vote history are included below:

[**S2-D: Relating to Ad Valorem Taxes/Tangible Personal Property**](#) (CTRL + click to follow link)

Proposes amendments to the State Constitution relating to property taxation. With respect to homestead property, this revision: (1) increases the homestead exemption except for school district taxes and (2) allows homestead property owners to transfer up to \$500,000 of their Save Our Homes benefits to their next homestead. With respect to nonhomestead property, this revision (3) provides a \$25,000 exemption for tangible personal property, etc.

[**S4-D: Relating to Ad Valorem Taxation**](#) (CTRL + click to follow link)

Authorizes the Department of Revenue to adopt emergency rules. Provides for the assessment of homestead property following a change of ownership based on the difference between just value and the assessed value of the immediate prior homestead. Increases the amount of the exemption provided for homestead property. Provides for an additional exemption for levies other than school district levies, etc.

[**S6-D: Relating to Special Election/Ad Valorem Taxation**](#) (CTRL + click to follow link)

Provides for a special election to be held January 29, 2008, for the approval or rejection by the electors of amendments to the State Constitution proposed by joint resolution. Provides for the publication of notice and for procedures, etc.

Children and Youth Cabinet

By Ben Kirby, Communications Director, JWB-CSC of Pinellas County

The University of South Florida in Tampa served as host for the second Florida Children and Youth Cabinet meeting on Tuesday, Oct. 30. Cabinet members discussed strategic planning, as well as vision, and heard public comments from a variety of speakers, including Vivian Alarcon, CEO of the Florida Children's Services Council.

Due to his obligations in Tallahassee on property tax reform, Cabinet Chair Lt. Governor Jeff Kottkamp was not able to attend. However, Florida's Chief Child Advocate and Cabinet Member Jim Kallinger served as Chair in the Lt. Governor's absence.

Much of the morning discussion centered on defining a cohesive vision and mission for the Cabinet. Members referred often to the statute creating the Cabinet, and set some early, rough parameters in which to operate. They agreed to bring a professional facilitator to the next discussion in order to assist with defining and refining their mission.

Sharon Lynn Kagan, Ed.D., of Columbia University helped guide discussion with an informative presentation on the Florida Policy Matters Project. She began with a briefing on brain development in young children and the importance of investing in early learning. She shared the findings of the Policy Matters project related to governance of early learning systems across the nation and issues that should be considered in Florida. Cabinet members engaged in an extended conversation with Dr. Kagan well past the allotted agenda time.

During the lunch break, Cabinet members heard from the Tampa Mayor's Youth Corps. Following conclusion of Cabinet business, the floor was opened for public comment and presentations. Members heard first from Vivian Alarcon on the funding role and philosophy of Florida CSCs. The Chairs of the North, Mid and South County Community Councils for the JWB Children's Services Council each presented community models of

success to the Cabinet. These presentations were designed, in part, to show the diverse needs of children and families even at the county level. Other presenters discussed specific projects and programs around the area.

The next scheduled meeting of the Children and Youth Cabinet is scheduled for January, although they will attempt to schedule a meeting in December to further discuss strategy and vision. Time and location will be announced at the Children's Cabinet web site: http://www.flgov.com/youth_cabinet. (CTRL + click to follow link)

Taxation and Budget Reform Commission

After conducting six public hearings around the state, members of the Taxation and Budget Reform Commission (TBRC) convened in Tallahassee Thursday to begin discussion about the proposals for legislation and constitutional amendments which they will put forth. The TBRC has authority to place amendments directly on the November 2008 ballot. Additionally, they will draft legislative recommendations to forward to the House and Senate.

The Finance and Tax Committee and the full TBRC focused discussions almost entirely on property tax yesterday. The prevailing opinion seems to be that the legislative proposals passed this week had not gone far enough. In particular, there was concern expressed about the lack of relief for small business and first-time home buyers.

For the next two months, the TBRC will accept proposals about what to do with property taxes and other elements of the tax system. Commission Chairman Allan Bense, former Speaker of the House from Panama City, says he expects the group to deal with property tax reform, but also encouraged members to take on issues beyond just local taxes. He asked commissioners to get written proposals in as soon as possible.

Deliberations on proposals will take place from November through January. The rules established by the TBRC require passage of ballot measures by 2/3 vote (17 members). Other recommendations will be adopted by simple majority (13 members). May 4 is the deadline for submitting constitutional amendments to the Secretary of State. For more information, visit the TBRC web site at: <http://www.floridatbrc.com/>. (CTRL + click to follow link)

Agency Legislative Budget Requests

The Executive Office of the Governor held a public hearing in Tallahassee on October 31 for the purpose of reporting on the legislative budget requests prepared by state agencies for FY 2008-09. These proposals will now be reviewed and revised as the Governor's Budget is finalized for presentation to the legislature. (CTRL + click to follow link)

- Agency for Health Care Administration: <http://ahca.myflorida.com/Admin/Budget/LBR/index.shtml>
- Agency for Workforce Innovation: www.floridacsc.org/docs/awi_budget_issue_narratives_OEL.pdf
- Department of Children and Families: <http://www.dcf.state.fl.us/publications/budget/>
- Department of Health: http://www.doh.state.fl.us/Admin/Budget/LBR_request_index.html
- Department of Juvenile Justice: http://www.djj.state.fl.us/AboutDJJ/Legislative_affairs/index.html

This special issue of Capitol Connection brought to you by The Firm, in conjunction with the FCSC Tallahassee office. Please contact Firm Chair Diana Ragbeer, Director of Public Affairs and Communications with The Children's Trust, at diana@thechildrenstrust.org or Vivian Alarcon, CEO, Florida Children's Services Council at valarcon@floridacsc.org with questions regarding legislative issues in this newsletter.