

FEA Frontline Report

2018 Legislative Session

Week 5 – Day 32

February 9, 2018

More than half way there...

Around here we celebrate little victories, and making it past the halfway point is a victory in and of itself. This week the bully voucher was heard in both the House and Senate, the monster education train bill HB 7055 passed the House, and both chambers took up and passed their budgets.

In this week's episode of *What Else Does the Legislature Consider besides Bills That Destroy Public Education: The Community Affairs Committee* in the Senate considered a bill to eliminate Confederate holidays in Florida. We learned through another bill about pre-empting local control of gardens that Florida does in fact grow corn. And during the *House Transportation and Tourism Appropriations Subcommittee*, when debating whether Auburn needs a license plate in Florida, the discussion of course turned to UCF's claim that they are the national champions. And we wonder why there isn't time for more bills to be considered. But I digress...

Train bills running us over

"HB 7055 is HB 7069 on steroids." – Rep. Kionne McGhee (R-Miami)

Yes, we're recycling the quote because it still applies. As you know, [HB 7055](#) is the bigger, badder version of HB 7069 and HB 7055 was heard by the full House on Wednesday and Thursday this week. We thank the many, many Democratic members who asked questions of the sponsor and didn't let up when they tried to divert attention away from some of the more egregious portions of the bill. Democrats held the same tenacity on Thursday when they literally spent hours debating and railing against the bill, and were locked down against HB 7055.

On Wednesday Rep. Geller (D-Dania Beach) offered three amendments (which failed. I know, you're shocked) to bring parity to charter school contracts and hold charters to the same accountability for when they receive a "D" or "F" grade. Rep. Jones (D-West Park) offered 18 amendments to the bill, including several to the bully voucher portion, all of which failed. Rep. Moskowitz (D-Coral Springs) offered an amendment to give parents the option to remove the bully from the school rather than removing their child who was bullied (it failed on a 44-67 vote but picked up 4 Republicans).

On Thursday during debate Rep. Ausley (D-Tallahassee) hit the nail on the head when she called out the bill for what it is: a bill to strip out the collective bargaining protections for instructional personnel – teachers, paraprofessionals and others who directly work with students. She went on to point out that the state's portion of the education budget, \$8.3 billion was tied to passage of a bill that directly hurts students and the people who are responsible for educating our students. Rep. Brown (D-Ocoee) railed against the fact that Democrats have been asking for years for funding for wrap around services and are told time and again that there are no funds available. Yet, miraculously the front rows of the chamber can come up with "new" money (read: re-directed general revenue) for students to attend private schools, even for parents who can certainly afford it. Rep. Stafford (D-Opa Locka) talked about how instructional personnel unions are carved out for decertification in the bill, at the same time teachers haven't seen significant pay increases in years. She stated, "Unions matter and unions are still needed." Rep. Smith (D-Winter Park) called out the sponsors for inclusion of the bully voucher in the bill in an effort to open up universal vouchers "one statute at a time, one budget line item at a time, one voucher at a time."

At the end of a very long Thursday, HB 7055 passed by a 66-43 vote. All Democrats and 5 Republicans, Reps. Clemens (R-Jonesville), Goodson (R-Merritt Island), Killebrew (R-Winter Haven), Peters (R-St. Petersburg), and Plasencia (R-Titusville) voted against HB 7055. If your Representative voted in opposition to HB 7055, we encourage you to take a moment and contact your legislator to thank them for standing up for students and teachers.

We now wait and see if the Senate will take up HB 7055 and how they will take up the bill. Indications are that the

Senate has zero appetite to be forced to take an up-or-down vote tied to the budget as they were last session under HB 7069. Late on Thursday the Senate President stated in a press avail that a bill that has substantial policy included (HB 7055) would be referred to committees and be heard through the committee process as a general bill, rather than as a conforming bill which is only available for an up-or-down vote and linked to passage of the budget.

Bully me once, shame on you, bully me twice, and we're coming for you

On Wednesday the [House Education Committee](#) heard [HB 1](#) by Rep. Donalds (R-Naples). As you may recall, this is the bully voucher bill that is a priority for Speaker Corcoran. The committee heard lengthy debate in opposition from FEA and representatives from the Southern Poverty Law Center, Common Ground, the Florida PTA and the Florida AFL-CIO. They also heard support from parents and students who are voucher recipients from Step Up for Students, while Jeb Bush's Foundation, Americans for Prosperity and the alternative group who claims to represent school boards waived in support. HB 1 passed by a 14-4 vote with Rep. Kimberly Daniels (D-Jacksonville) joining the Republicans in support.

On Thursday the [Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on PreK-12 Education](#) heard [SB 1172](#) by Senator Galvano (R-Bradenton), the companion legislation to HB 1. The senate's version keeps the funding for the voucher at \$20 per car sale rather than the \$105 that the House includes. The other difference in the Senate bill is that the school principal or his or her designee, has to substantiate a claim of bullying, violence or harassment before a student can obtain a voucher for private school. FEA also took the podium in this committee to testify in opposition, as did the Southern Poverty Law Center. Step up for Students and Jeb Bush's Foundation were there to waive in support. SB 1172 passed by a party-line 6-2 vote.

HB 1 is now ready for a full floor vote, if they bring the bill to the floor at all since it's also wrapped up in HB 7055. SB 1172 has one more committee of reference before its ready for the Senate floor for a full vote.

Money, money, money... MONEY

Each chamber took up their budgets and passed them off the floor Thursday. The Senate passed their budget 33-1 while the House passed their budget 85-27.

Thank you to Rep. Jones and Rep. Cruz (D-Tampa) who highlighted that charter schools received a \$70.3 million increase in PECO funding, while neighborhood public schools received no increase in PECO funding. That breaks out to \$120 million in PECO funds for charters, while public schools only get \$50 million. In case you were wondering what that means per student, that's a difference of \$423 per FTE going to charter schools but only \$20 per FTE in neighborhood public schools.

Rep. Mercado (D-Orlando) questioned Rep. Diaz (R-Hialeah Gardens) about the funding for the so-called "Schools of Hope" \$140 million allocation and how many charter schools have applied for those funds (answer: none) and Rep. Stafford pointedly asked Chair Diaz whether the budget included enough funding to raises for teachers (another answer: it doesn't).

Rep. Richardson (D-Miami Beach) questioned why the \$8 billion in FEFP (K-12 public school funding) is contingent on passage of HB 7055, the bad education train bill. Rep. Diaz did a good little dance trying to defend why the proviso should remain. Rep. Richardson also offered an amendment to strike the proviso language in the budget, but in typical fashion, it failed by a 39-72 vote.

Meanwhile in the other chamber, the Senate took up their budget which is slightly better for education funding for the coming year as we outlined in last week's Frontline. They quietly passed their version with little fanfare. What was very interesting was during the debate on SB 2502 – the Senate's budget implementing bill – Senator Braynon (D-Miami Gardens) took the opportunity during debate to state, "I want to make clear that this bill implements the budget. It does not implement policy that hasn't been heard or vetted in committees. I'm proud that this chamber has taken a firm stance that we will not be passing policy in our budget. So let's continue to stand strong Senate."

Budget Chairman, Senator Bradley (R-Orange Park) then stated, "I want to thank Senator Braynon and reiterate what he said and what we have said: this chamber will not be passing policy in our budget. That is our stance, that is our position,

and it continues to be the position of the Senate.” We’ll see if that holds true as the budget conference begins and only a handful of people are deciding what policies become law, and what line items are funded in the budget.

Members in the House and Senate

We’d like to thank our members from Broward, Miami-Dade and Pasco Counties who traveled to Tallahassee this week. Our members were busy attending press conferences against HB 7055, running the gauntlet for legislators who were heading into the chamber to debate the budget and HB 7055, attended many committee meetings where bills of interest were heard, and discussed issues with Legislators and staff in their offices.



Rep. Jones at the podium in opposition to HB 7055, and joined by Reps. Asencio, McGhee, Newton, Richardson, Stark, and teachers and union members from across Florida.

Please click here <https://feaweb.org/planning-a-session-visit-let-us-know-when> to notify PPA of your travel dates, members’ and local staff names and contact information for the team if you are planning to travel to Tallahassee for session. This will help the PPA team prepare materials in advance and schedule adequate time to serve your members. As you pack for your trip, please remember to dress in appropriate business attire (dresses, dress slacks with blouses or sweaters, or suits) and don’t forget your comfortable dress shoes. Winter weather can be tricky in Tallahassee. We recommend bringing a layers, a jacket and an umbrella.

Questions? Call PPA at 850-224-2078.

Editor-in-Chief, Sharon Nesvig, always correcting my grammar and punctuation and keeping me from being too mean, contributed her talents again this week! And thanks to Ron Bilbao for budget content.