



The Budget Breakdown

This week we discussed the Senate’s proposed budget, SB 2500, on the Senate Floor. This [429 page document](#) outlines the Senate’s priorities for the State of Florida and how we will be spending your taxpayer dollars for Fiscal Year 19-20. The total budget that was introduced totals at \$90.3 billion. Below I have separated the budget into subject areas or what we call “silos” and have highlighted some key issues in each area. The Senate passed their version of the budget off the floor on Wednesday. Soon we will be entering what is called “budget conference” where the Senate and the House work together in joint committees to resolve differences in each chamber’s version of the budget to create one comprehensive plan which is to be passed and sent to the Governor for any line item vetoes.

Education

The total allocation for Education in the budget for the State of Florida is \$34.9 billion. This comes from \$22.7 billion in state funds and \$12.2 billion in local funds.

With these dollars we have increased the funding per student to schools by \$350

bringing the total per student funding to \$7,779. The Senate has also invested in the safety of our schools and has allocated \$230 million to ensure each school has at least one school safety officer. In addition to this line item is another \$62.7 million designated for school safety which districts can use to install or upgrade security equipment and harden schools. There is a focus on our students' mental health in this budget with a \$100 million allocation for Mental Health Assistance to schools.

Lastly, in regards to Public Education Capital Outlay (PECO) funding, which is utilized to make improvements in the infrastructure of school buildings and allow for routine maintenance we have seen an interesting shift. \$15 million was allocated in PECO funds for charters schools and \$31 million for traditional public schools. While I am pleased to see the Senate distributing these funds more proportionately than in past budgets between charter schools and traditional public schools, both PECO allocations have decreased significantly over last year's budget. PECO funds for charter schools has decreased by \$130 million dollars and for traditional public schools the dollars have decreased by \$19 million. Many of our schools are in great need of maintenance and repairs so I am disappointed to see this funding decreased across the board.

Health and Human Services

\$37.74 billion dollars is allocated for Health and Human Services, which is an increase of 1.6% over last year.

Florida and Palm Beach County specifically have been hit hard by the opioid epidemic that remains rampant in our country. This budget includes \$59 million dollars to help address this epidemic and provide treatment for those affected. There was also a \$7.5 million increase appropriated for the Community Mental Health & Substance Abuse Block Grant.

The Public Guardianship Program waitlist will be eliminated with the \$2.5 million in funding proposed in this budget and \$5 million has been allocated to serve elders on the waitlist for community care. Unfortunately no funding was provided for the Statewide Medicaid Managed Care Long-term Care Waiver slots.

I have deep concerns that the Senate has not included Medicaid Expansion into its version of the budget which would draw down billions in federal dollars to insure

approximately 1 million Floridians who fall into the insurance gap. Additionally, the Medicaid Retroactive Eligibility cuts from last year are maintained which means that the state will no longer pay for eligible patients medical bills that they accrued 90 days prior to becoming enrolled. This continuation will affect the elderly, individuals with disabilities, and those with severe medical issues the most.

Criminal and Civil Justice

In the Criminal and Civil Justice silo, \$5.4 billion is allocated, which is an increase of \$200 million dollars from the last year.

I am happy to report that there have been significant increases to healthcare and mental health services allocations with an additional \$167.3 million dollars. \$29 million has been set aside for education programs which has been increased from last year and there is a line item that provides \$500,000 for the implementation of amendments 4 and 11 which were passed by the voters in November.

While the increased investment in healthcare and mental health has been an important feature of this portion of the budget, juvenile diversion programs have been cut substantially to the tune of \$13 million dollars. What I find most troubling in this silo of the budget is that there were no appropriations for staffing within the Department of Corrections (DOC) which was the DOC's number one priority. Failure to pay corrections officers an adequate raise affects retention and can compromise inmate and facility safety.

Transportation, Tourism and Economic Development

A total of \$14.6 billion dollars have been set aside for the Transportation, Tourism and Economic Development portion of the budget with Affordable Housing Programs being funded at \$331.9 million dollars.

I am pleased to see that, for the most part, the Senate has significantly invested in the arts and cultural grants this year. The last item to note is the Transportation Disadvantaged pool, which helps fund services such as Palm Tran Connection in Palm Beach County to provide transportation to those with disabilities, is funded at \$55.9 million dollars.

Agriculture, Environment and General Government

\$5.9 billion dollars have been allocated for Agriculture, Environment and General Government spending. This is a slight decrease of \$160 million from last year's budget. With the environmental challenges we have seen in our state I am disappointed that we are not making a larger investment, or at least seeing some increase from last year, in this portion of the budget.

For projects related to water quality \$656 million has been appropriated. Consistent with many past budgets we are providing \$100 million for the restoration of Florida's springs. The red tide and algal bloom issue we have experienced this past year has spurred a \$10.8 million dollar investment for the Blue Green Algae Task Force, \$10 million dollars set aside for Innovative Technology Grants for Harmful Algal Blooms, and \$6.6 million allocated for Red Tide Research.

All of the items above are promising, however there has only been \$45 million dollars designated for Florida Forever, the state's premier conservation and recreation lands acquisition program. In previous years this program has received funding of up to \$300 million dollars due to its importance in assisting in the effort to conserve and protect our natural environment.

Local Funding Initiative Requests

Also included in the Senate's Budget is funding for several local projects that I have submitted for consideration and have advocated on behalf of. I am happy to report that six local projects I have submitted for have been funded in this budget as we go into the conference process. These items include the Jewish Federation Senior Transportation Services, Lake Worth Lagoon Initiative, Greenacres Sewer Extension, Lake Clarke Shores Septic to Sewer Conversion, and an appropriation for ChildNet to prevent opioid and substance abuse based removals.

I will keep you informed as to the status of the state budget next week. Have a great weekend!

Best wishes,



Lori Berman, State Senator District 31

Header background painting by Palm Beach County artist Ralph Papa.

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