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THE BERMAN BUZZ



LEGISLATIVE SESSION WEEK 7

Dear Friends & Neighbors,

As we wind down the final few weeks of the 2020 legislative session, we hope you will take in some of what occurred this week in Tallahassee.



This week we welcomed students from the Greater Miami Jewish Federation and the Miami-Dade Branch of the NAACP. I always enjoy speaking to young people who are making a difference for our future generations.

Bill Action Update

My bill on Decedents' Property, [SB 358](#), passed unanimously in its final committee stop, Rules. I anticipate the bill being heard and passed on the Senate floor this upcoming week or during our final week.

This bill amends several sections of the probate and trust code relating to the compensation of attorneys and categorizes as tangible property bullion and coins, such as collectible coins, that are not used as money.

Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence - HB 1087

A recent investigation uncovered that the Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence, a non-profit organization that provides domestic violence programs using state funds, paid its former CEO over \$7 million in compensation over a three year period. While I am in full agreement and voted in favor of the termination of this partnership between FCADV and the state, I have concerns about DCF continuing these vital and time-sensitive services seamlessly. For now, the investigation will continue and we will keep a close eye on DCF's new oversight role to ensure services are uninterrupted.

Budget Update

It is anticipated that next week will begin budget negotiations between the House and Senate. Both chambers will be tasked with ensuring the silos for each of the major subject areas, including education, health care, criminal justice, transportation and economic development and agriculture/environment line up equally. Passing a balanced budget is the one constitutional duty we have as legislators in Florida. It is my hope that those of us in the minority will have a seat at the table once we begin this process. Representation by all members is important and good for all of Florida.

Coronavirus Update

On behalf of the Senate Democratic Caucus, Minority Leader Audrey Gibson and I sent the below letter to the Governor's office this past week. Alarmed by the lack of information disclosed during a press conference on coronavirus (COVID-19) during the Governor's press conference, we are seeking, on behalf of the public, detailed answers to explicit questions about state preparations for a possible COVID-19 outbreak in Florida.



AUDREY GIBSON
Minority Leader

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BILL MONTFORD
Minority Leader Pro Tempore

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February 27, 2020

The Honorable Ron DeSantis
Governor of the State of Florida
The Capitol
400 S. Monroe St.
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0001

Dear Governor DeSantis,

As members of the Senate Democratic Caucus, we are very concerned about the Center for Disease Control's recent update regarding the spread of coronavirus, also known as "COVID-19." In a strongly worded warning, the CDC has asked Americans to prepare for more disruptive measures to address the outbreak.

With many details left out of the press conference you held this morning, we would like to ascertain what specific plans are being made in our state.

Specifically, we ask that you address the following questions:

1. What is the Department of Health's plan to mitigate the spread of coronavirus should a case be confirmed in Florida?
2. What is the Department of Health doing to prepare and protect hospitals, hospital workers, and all health care workers?
3. Are there different protocols for long-term care facilities, including nursing homes and assisted living facilities? Are staff and visitor screening protocols currently under consideration given that the elderly and immune-compromised are especially vulnerable to the disease?
4. Will the Department of Health be providing face masks to the public? Is there a stockpile of facemasks? Will basic surgical masks protect from COVID-19? If not, does the Department of Health suggest the public wear N95 Respirators designed to control exposure to the infection? And if so, will the agency be in a position to supply

them given that many typical suppliers are already sold out or have drastically raised their prices?

5. Has the Department of Health been communicating with local health departments to coordinate a plan to contain the virus? Do those plans include quarantines, and if so, how are they expected to be executed?
6. Will the Department of Health coordinate with school districts, higher education institutions, and community centers to create emergency plans?
7. Does the Department of Health have adequate staff and resources to control an outbreak? Are there stockpiles of medical supplies?
8. Who pays for and produces the test kits and are there adequate resources to acquire them? Will Florida be able to test on its own without the CDC? How soon will the results of the test kits be available?
9. Does the Department of Health anticipate it will communicate to the public what provisions might be necessary for individuals to prepare for an outbreak?
10. What is the procedure for health care workers to report suspected cases of COVID-19?
11. We understand that the Division of Emergency Management is in a support-role right now - what type of support are they offering the Department of Health at this time? Do you anticipate that the Division of Emergency Management will play a larger role, and if so, what additional responsibilities might they assume? Are they trained and equipped to deal with disease outbreaks such as COVID-19?

We would be most happy to meet with you to discuss this matter. We look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,

Senator Audrey Gibson

Senator Audrey Gibson
Senate Democratic Minority Leader
District 6

Senator Lori Berman

Vice Chair, Senate Health Policy Committee
District 31

BILL GALVANO
President of the Senate

DAVID BIMMONS
President Pro Tempore

Palm Beach County Administrator Provides Update on Coronavirus Readiness Coordination

For immediate release: February 27, 2020

For more information: Public Affairs, 355-2754

At the February 27 Zoning Board meeting, Palm Beach County Administrator Verdenia Baker gave an update on the county's readiness for addressing the coronavirus, COVID 19, if needed.

To date, no confirmed cases of coronavirus have been reported in Florida.

County officials are working closely with the Florida Department of Health (FDOH) Palm Beach County, the lead response agency when a communicable disease outbreak threatens.

Palm Beach County is preparing for the potential of community spread through a variety of collaborative and containment strategies. There will be ongoing dialogue and coordination with community partners, municipalities, hospitals, nonprofits, school officials, and other partners within the emergency management community.

The health department will continue to investigate, confirm and report any suspected cases to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). Thus far, all locally investigated cases have simply been the flu, not coronavirus.

It should be noted that county officials and their community partners have successfully addressed threats posed by several communicable diseases in the recent past, including West Nile virus (2018), chikungunya (2017), Zika virus (2016), Ebola (2014) and H1N1 (2009).

Health officials recommend everyone do their part as it is currently flu season and advise that anyone who did not get a flu vaccination should do so, and to follow these preventive practices:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially using the bathroom; before eating; and after blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing.
- If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, mouth and face.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick or exhibit symptoms.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- If you have to cough or sneeze, cover your mouth and nose with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash and disinfect your hands.

- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using a regular household cleaning spray or an alcohol wipe.

Commissioners will be updated again at the March 10 BCC meeting. The latest coronavirus information from the CDC and FDOH is available at pbcgov.com.



Thank you to our Doctor of the Day, Dr. Ankush Bansal, for again returning to Tallahassee to represent District 31. Dr. Bansal stood in and answered questions regarding coronavirus during a press conference with Senator Jose Javier Rodriguez and Senator Victor Torres.

Thank you for being interested and reading our weekly newsletter. Please feel free to get in touch with our office with any questions you may have as the final two weeks approach. We will be sure to provide a budget update as soon as one is available and look forward to returning home to District 31 for additional legislative briefings.

All the best,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lori Berman" followed by a horizontal line.

Lori Berman, State Senator District 31

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