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## **Legislative Session: Week Four**

**Dear Friends,**

**The fourth week of our legislative session has concluded and we are inching towards the halfway point.**

**Please check out my legislative update below. As always, thank you for the honor of representing you in the Florida Senate. Feel free to reach out to my office anytime with any questions you may have, legislatively or otherwise (*Local/District office in Boynton Beach is 561.292.6014 and Tallahassee office is 850.487.5031*).**

**Stay**

**well,**

A handwritten signature of Lori Berman in black ink, written on a white rectangular background.

**Lori Berman**

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## Senator Berman's Bill Actions

### **SB 1518**

Lactation Space— *PASSED SENATE GOVERNMENTAL OVERSIGHT & ACCOUNTABILITY COMMITTEE*

SB 1518 will require Florida county courthouses to have a dedicated lactation space for attorneys, jurors, courthouse staff and courthouse patrons. This bill removes a barrier for women returning to the workplace and it recognizes the health, economic impact and contribution of working mothers.

### **SB 600**

Upgrades to Education Facilities as Emergency Shelters- *PASSED EDUCATION COMMITTEE*

SB 600 would enhance our Florida district public schools by providing upgrades that improve the capability of our schools to serve as shelters. Upgrades will be applied to areas such as hurricane protection, electrical and standby emergency power systems, renewable energy source devices, and energy storage devices. This bill will promote energy saving in our schools, safer shelters for communities, and perhaps even STEM learning opportunities for students.

### **SB 406**

Secured Transactions- *PASSED ON THE SENATE FLOOR*

SB 406 provides a legislative fix to a previous circuit court ruling known as "Kearney". In the case, a consumer pledged assets allowing a creditor to attach those assets, such as an IRA, pension plan, annuity, or life insurance contract, which were otherwise exempt under Florida law, at the risk of forfeiture and confiscatory taxation. This will prevent consumers from unknowingly waiving their statutory exemptions and incurring unintended consequences.

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## Press Conference on 15-Week Abortion Ban

I joined with my legislative colleagues and several physicians, who are experts in their fields, to speak out against [SB 146/HB 5](#), a ban to end abortions after 15 weeks. The bill offers no exception for rape or incest.

Abortion is healthcare. Gutting this life-saving measure is dangerous to women all over our country and state. These proposals threaten access to healthy family

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planning, cancer screenings and birth control. We know that abortion restrictions also disproportionately harm people of color, people with disabilities, people in rural areas, immigrants and those with less financial means. We should be focusing on ways in which to prevent unwanted pregnancies, including long acting reversible contraception (a bill I have previously sponsored), age-appropriate and comprehensive sex education and focus on reducing maternal mortality, among other things. The next closest state a woman could seek an abortion after 15 weeks, should this bill pass, would be North Carolina. This potential delay of medical care creates a host of dangers to both woman and baby. We heard from the physicians both at the press conference and during the Senate Health Policy testimony story after story of women who sought abortions for any number of reasons, whether to save their own lives, a fetal abnormality that would prohibit the family from being able to provide financially for the future of the child, due to an accidental pregnancy despite using birth control, or in an extremely horrible case, an 11-year-old girl who was impregnated by her father. This is unacceptable. These decisions are deeply personal, difficult and NEVER taken lightly, and no government or politician should be making these decisions.

This proposed ban is the most draconian I have seen in my 12 year tenure and I am strongly opposed to this legislation. The bill passed the Senate Health Policy Committee this past week and is expected to be heard in its next committee of reference (Appropriations) soon. As we await the United States Supreme Court to rule on Mississippi's proposed ban on abortions, we must fight back to defend Roe v. Wade.

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## Controversial Bills/Issues to Watch

### **SB 524: Election Administration**

In 2021, SB 90 was passed, a bill that set forward a lot of changes surrounding election laws. Most people would suggest this was a politically motivated bill laden with unnecessary and burdensome requirements that would cost taxpayers an exorbitant amount of money to carry out. Amid litigation at this very moment, SB 524 was filed to and will likely wreak further havoc on the elections process. Not one Supervisor of Election from any of our 67 counties asked for this legislation and not only that, but several SOEs spoke up against the bill in the Ethics and Elections Committee this past week. Not only all of this, but a "Proposed Committee Substitute" (PCS) was released 24 hours before the committee met, giving little

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time for review, analyzation, discussion with the bill sponsor, or an opportunity to amend. This is an intentional tactic to try to keep the process from operating in the sunshine and gives little way for citizens to physically get to Tallahassee to testify.

There are four main components to this bill, laid out below:

**1. Office of Election Crimes/Security**

Despite the consistent and repeated mantra by the Governor that the 2020 elections went smoothly, this portion of the bill is a complete waste of taxpayer dollars; possibly upwards of \$5 million or higher. It would establish a "police force" by which investigations into voter fraud would be made, despite the fact that hardly any cases of fraud exist. Law enforcement agencies, local elections officials and prosecutors already have the tools to investigate election fraud as needed. This merely exists to target grassroots organizations.

**2. Ranked Choice Voting**

The bill would prohibit cities or counties from enacting ranked choice voting even if their electorate votes on it in a city or county wide election. According to a Florida Politico article, the Secretary of State has already admitted that cities could adopt ranked-choice voting systems into their charters. There is no basis for this new prohibition.

**3. Third Party Voter Registration Organizations (3PVRO)**

A representative from the League of Voters was cited stating that voter registration forms are rarely turned in late. 3PVRO organizations often assist with registering disadvantaged, minority and disabled populations. Florida's controversial election laws have been cited by various nonprofit organizations to be harmful to these voter registration efforts. This section would raise the cap from an aggregate set of fines of \$1,000 for any violation of this section to upwards of \$50,000. This will have a chilling effect on grassroots organizations, especially those who have good inroads with rural communities where there is already a lack of distrust.

**4. Additional Vote-By-Mail & ID Requirements**

Under this proposal, a third envelope would now need to be required by the SOEs when mailing out VBMs along with a new "identifying number" (ID or SSN) on this additional envelope. Exposing additional personal information is extremely dangerous, especially when

place in the mail. This poses serious concerns and is just another barrier to make it harder and discourage voters from using VBM.

The bill would require the DMV to furnish a monthly list of persons who submitted applications and presented evidence of non-United States citizenship when being issued a new Florida driver's license or ID, and their personal information, including addresses and ID information.

Florida law is clear: only citizens may vote. What is the intention of the bill sponsor for the Department of State to keep such a list? What will be done with it? Would this information be held confidential? These are just a few of the questions I have.

We can call this what it is: Democrats outnumbered Republicans in vote-by-mail ballots in 2020 and this is merely another way to make voting harder.

#### CS/SB 520: Public Records & Public Meetings

Transparency in Presidential searches in higher education benefits the students, faculty and staff at Florida's public colleges and universities. The only reason to remove these candidates from the sunshine is to promote inside candidates and political appointees, a trend that has been on the rise in recent years. Clearly, political appointees come with a set of conflicts of interest. The First Amendment Foundation and the United Faculty of Florida are two major opponents of this bill and I stand with both of these organizations. This bill was brought forward in 2021 and fell short by only one vote, as a two-thirds vote if required to change a public records law. It is my hope this bill will once again fail.

#### **Surgeon General - Dr. Joseph Ladapo's Nomination**

This week, the Senate Ethics and Elections Committee will take up the nomination of Dr. Joseph Ladapo as the State's Surgeon General, appointed by Governor DeSantis. New allegations stemming from Dr. Ladapo's previous employer, UCLA, only reaffirm my grave concerns with his appointment.

Below is the statement I have made in previous newsletters and it remains true still:



*"I strongly oppose Dr. Ladapo's nomination and will vote against his confirmation when it comes before me in the Senate Ethics and Elections Committee.*

*The COVID-19 pandemic has exacted a horrible toll on our country and state. I believe that our only way through it – and through any difficult challenge facing our society – is by putting politics aside and coming together. But Governor DeSantis decided early on he would politicize the pandemic and further divide our state. He's politicized mask use in our schools and businesses, even though its conventional science and proven to reduce transmission. He's politicized vaccines through disinformation and attacked the Biden Administration for simply having a strong plan to end the pandemic. He's done little to protect lives and cares more about waging culture wars and stoking political divide than getting our state through this crisis.*

*The latest manifestation of his war on public health is the nomination of Dr. Ladapo for Surgeon General. With just months on the job as interim Surgeon General, he's peddled in the same vaccine and mask conspiracies as the Governor, even refusing to wear a mask in the office of my friend and colleague, Senator Tina Polsky, who is battling cancer. Nothing could be more disrespectful and dangerous. He lacks experience in infectious diseases and epidemiology at a time when the public needs it most. He is not fit to lead our Department of Health."*

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## **Free At-Home COVID-19 Tests**

**President Biden's Administration this month launched a government website for Americans to order free COVID-19 tests. Every home in the U.S. is eligible to order four rapid antigen tests. The tests are completely free. Orders will usually ship in 7-12 days. Order your tests now so you have them if/when you need them.**

**[Order Free COVID-19 Tests Here](#)**

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**PBC COVID-19 Vaccination Sites**

**PBC COVID-19 Testing Sites**

**PBC COVID-19 Testing Sites**

**State and Local Resources**







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