

WEEKLY TALLAHASSEE UPDATE



We are now entering the final stretch of session, and Week 6 was largely about positioning for budget negotiations while several high-impact policy bills continued to move. The biggest story in Tallahassee right now is the budget. The House and Senate are still working through differences, particularly in Transportation and Economic Development funding, and those differences will have to narrow quickly if session is going to end on time. For our business community, the budget is more than numbers on a spreadsheet. It determines how much support flows into workforce training, infrastructure, housing programs, and economic development tools that directly influence job growth and regional competitiveness.

In the **Transportation and Economic Development budgets**, both chambers continue funding items like VISIT Florida, Space Florida, SAIL affordable housing loans, and Select Florida. Where there is more disagreement in tools like the Florida Job Growth Grant Fund, where the Senate has appropriated \$50 million but the House hasn't appropriated anything. That program is designed to support public infrastructure and workforce training projects that help communities recruit and expand employers. Whether funding remains in the final budget will matter for regions trying to upgrade infrastructure, expand industrial capacity, or strengthen high-demand trade programs. The chambers are also far apart on certain aspects of FDOT's multi-year work program. Even when projects are not in our immediate area, statewide transportation capacity affects freight movement, construction schedules, tourism flow, and overall economic efficiency.

One of the more talked-about policy bills advancing is **SB 482, often referred to as the Artificial Intelligence Bill of Rights**. Its stated goal is to establish consumer protections around AI, particularly for minors who use companion chatbot platforms, and to address issues surrounding personal data and the unauthorized use of a person's name, image, or likeness. The bill includes disclosure requirements in certain contexts and provides a private right of action for enforcement. While protecting minors and personal data is a reasonable objective, the details matter. Many businesses are now using AI tools in customer service, marketing, hiring, training, and product development. Broad or unclear language combined with expanded litigation exposure could create compliance burdens and legal risk for companies that are not traditional tech firms but are simply integrating modern tools into their operations.

Another measure drawing attention is **SB 484, which creates a statewide framework related to large-scale data centers**. The bill addresses issues tied to electric load, utility planning, water use, and transparency. It directs the Public Service Commission to develop minimum requirements for large load customers and limits certain non-disclosure agreements. It also includes provisions affecting water permitting and preserves certain elements of local planning authority. Data centers can bring construction jobs, long-term investment, and opportunities to expand a tech ecosystem. At the same time, they place significant demand on energy infrastructure and water resources. The question is whether Florida can strike the right balance between attracting investment and protecting grid reliability and rate stability, which ultimately affect every business that pays a power bill.

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Property tax reform continues to move through the House, with HJR 203 and HB 203 proposing to eliminate non-school property taxes on homestead property while retaining school district levies. On its face, this is positioned as relief for homeowners. However, local governments rely heavily on property tax revenue to fund core services. When a large portion of residential property taxes is removed, cities and counties must either reduce services, increase fees, or shift the tax burden elsewhere. Historically, that shift often lands on commercial property owners and employers. This is the type of proposal that requires careful analysis because what looks like relief in one column of the ledger can reappear as pressure in another.

Related to local revenues, HB 103 and its Senate companion SB 122 address local business taxes, often referred to as occupational license taxes. The House bill repeals most local authority to levy these taxes, with limited exceptions. For small businesses, especially those operating in multiple jurisdictions, this could reduce administrative friction and recurring costs. For local governments, it creates a revenue gap that may be replaced through other fees or assessments. The net impact will depend on whether the repeal truly reduces the overall cost of doing business or simply shifts it.

HB 1407 and SB 1096 focus on clarifying timelines under the Florida Civil Rights Act. These bills adjust notice and filing requirements and aim to create more predictable deadlines for certain civil actions. From an employer's perspective, clarity and predictability reduce prolonged uncertainty around potential claims. This is less about limiting rights and more about ensuring that disputes move forward within defined timeframes so both employers and employees have resolution.

One litigation-related proposal, SB 1506, which sought to address jury anchoring and standards for reviewing noneconomic damages, did not advance and is effectively dead for the session. For many industries, including construction and healthcare-adjacent fields, the broader litigation climate continues to influence insurance costs and operational risk. The failure of that measure means the status quo remains in place for now.

On workforce development, SB 1246, along with related measures, expands the LINE Fund concept beyond nursing to address broader health science workforce shortages. The goal is to update eligibility and matching requirements to strengthen the pipeline of trained professionals. Healthcare workforce stability affects not just hospitals and clinics but the broader business environment. When healthcare systems are strained, the ripple effects are felt across the economy.

Permitting reform is another area to watch. **HB 803** and **SB 1234** aim to create more uniform building permit applications across the state, tighten standards around private providers, and reduce duplicative inspections. For contractors, developers, property managers, and businesses looking to expand, time lost in permitting is real money. Greater uniformity and predictability can reduce delays and improve project planning.

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Finally, **HB 1093 and SB 1362 position Florida to support advanced air mobility and vertiport development.** These measures add vertiports and related charging systems as qualifying projects under certain public-private partnership structures and address liability considerations. While this may feel futuristic, policy decisions made today influence where emerging technologies invest tomorrow. Land use, infrastructure readiness, and liability frameworks all shape long-term economic positioning.

As we move into the final weeks, the most important developments will likely come from budget negotiations and the evolution of property tax proposals. For our Venice business community, the focus remains the same: policies that support infrastructure, workforce development, reasonable tax structures, and a predictable regulatory environment.

Thank you for reading.

-Justin Taylor, Venice Area Chamber of Commerce, Public Policy Committee

Sources:

- FLHouse.gov
- FLSenate.gov
- FLChamber.com