



JAN - MAR 2022 | 2ND QUARTER

THE QUARTERLY FOCUS

The Florida Association of Special Districts' Official Newsletter

CHECK OUT WHAT'S
INSIDE THE ISSUE:

**Message from The
President**

**Message from The
Executive Director**

Quarterly Meetings

Annual Conference

Dates To Remember

Member Benefits

State Advocacy

Member Spotlight

Around The Districts

Membership

2ND QUARTER RECAP

Written by FASD Staff

This quarter was very busy for us at FASD Headquarters. The year started off with a successful Legislative Forum held at the Old Capitol in Tallahassee with special guests CFO Jimmy Patronis and Agriculture Commissioner Nikki Fried. During the Forum we also recognized the CDM Program Scholarship recipients and we are grateful to the FASD Education Foundation for making this possible. February was dedicated to creating our new and improved FASD website. We are happy with the way it has turned out and we encourage everyone to use this website as much as possible for event dates, quarterly meeting registration and payments, membership renewal, and the new social community! This is a way for our members to stay in touch with one another in real time and request document templates and discuss best practices. Another feature is the Job Board forum. You are able to post open positions within your district at your discretion. If you need any assistance while getting acclimated to these changes, please contact us at (850) 999-1937 or email me at rachel@fasd.com.





MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Written by Jim Millican

We had a fantastic Legislative Forum in Tallahassee at the Old Capital in January, along with a great showing of members. According to our survey, all in attendance loved the new format. Next year we are planning to have a two-day event held at the Capitol. Thank you to everyone who helped make this event a success: David Ramba, Chris Lyon, Laura Donaldson, for their legislative updates as well as J Angle Group and Ramba Consulting Group for sponsoring the event.

We are very excited for our April General Membership meeting. We have had such an increase in registration that we had to get a second hotel. The first day we will host two eight-hour certified Mental Health First Aid classes. These classes are sponsored by the Gehring Group, one of our very own Associate Members, as well as FHE Health. There are only a few spots left and will undoubtedly open the eyes of anyone in a supervisory role to mental health in the workplace. In addition to these classes, we have continuing education classes scheduled all day Thursday for those that didn't get to attend the Mental Health First Aid courses. On Friday we will have our General Membership meeting, Board Meeting, along with continuing education classes.

Don't forget our annual conference is just around the corner in June. FASD Undercover—Detecting the New Normal is what our conference will be focused on, with a Miami Vice theme. The dates are June 13th-16th. We will be hosting our 2nd round of CDM classes for 2022 during the conference. This year we have new classes as well as new speakers at this year's conference. Our keynote speaker will be on Thursday and is motivational speaker and author Kevin Brown. He's passionate about helping people and organizations embrace a simple philosophy that separates world-class organizations and high-performance people from everybody else - he calls it The HERO Effect®. Through his books and presentations, Kevin entertains, inspires, and challenges people to show up every day and make a positive difference at work and in life! Kevin Brown is from the Orlando area and when I saw him present in California it was standing room only. If you didn't get in on the Mental Health First Aide class at the April meeting, don't worry you will have more opportunities to register at the conference. This is a great class to send your HR person and any level of your management staff. This class is applicable to to all special districts.

I am looking forward to seeing everyone in Tampa at the April General Membership meeting and start getting ready to go undercover Miami Vice style in June.

WE ARE VERY EXCITED FOR OUR APRIL GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING. WE HAVE HAD SUCH AN INCREASE IN REGISTRATION THAT WE HAD TO GET A SECOND HOTEL.



MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Written by David E. Ramba

As we enter the 3rd quarter, I want to take a moment of time to share encouraging news from our work and to share accomplishments Florida Association of Special Districts has made in 2022.

The most exciting news is that as of March 31, we have surpassed our budgeted Membership Dues for the entire fiscal year. This means we have collected more dues from District Members and Associate Members in two quarters than what was budgeted last year. We are on the right track to offer more member benefits and more educational opportunities than before.

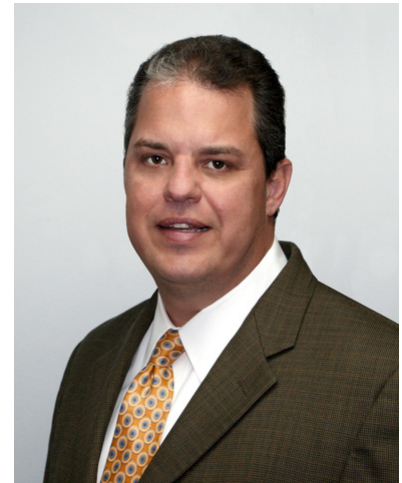
This upcoming April Quarterly Membership Meeting (April 21 – 22) will offer a brand new Mental Health First Aid Course. This course is a skills-based training course that teaches participants about mental health and substance-use issues. We have had an incredible turn out and encourage you to register if you haven't already. The course is on Thursday, April 21, from 9:00 AM to 5:30 PM, with lunch included. You will receive 8 CEUs and the cost is included with the meeting registration. If you would like to pop in for the day to take the course, the cost is \$100.00 for members, and \$200.00 for non-members.

Due to the popularity of this class, we had to secure an additional hotel. Please see our [Quarterly Meetings](#) page at fasd.com for specific details.

Another important item we are helping our fire districts with is the new state-mandated Fire Districts Performance Review. Earlier this month we provided an important set of documents to help guide our first district members with this momentous task. In order to view these member-specific documents, you must be logged in on our website. Once there, navigate to Membership > Resources > Fire District Performance Review RFP. This page provides all necessary background and documents with attorney comments.

Our legislative session ended March 14 and lawmakers approved the state's biggest-ever budget, a \$112 billion plan that includes a gas-tax holiday, pay raises for state workers, and more spending than the governor's proposal. Ultimately, Gov. DeSantis will have final say over how much the state spends in the 2022-23 fiscal year. He should be pleased; lawmakers funded nearly all of his priorities.

We have had a fun time preparing for this year's Annual Conference. We will be in Orlando June 13 – 16 where the theme is Detecting the New Normal. We will analyze how to move forward in a post-COVID Florida. There are new sponsorship opportunities, a new key note speaker, as well as a new Wine Down Wednesday format. A specific agenda will be coming out soon. We encourage you to [register](#) early for the early bird rates—after May 6, the rates increase.



THE MOST EXCITING NEWS IS THAT AS OF MARCH 31, WE HAVE SURPASSED OUR BUDGETED MEMBERSHIP DUES FOR THE ENTIRE FISCAL YEAR



QUARTERLY MEETINGS



JANUARY

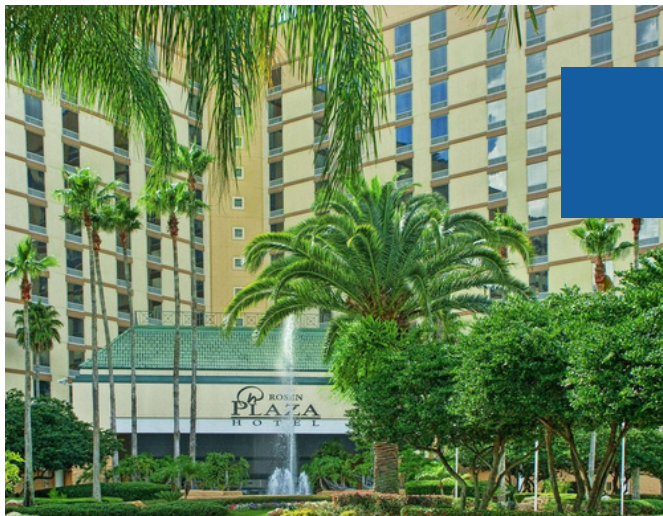
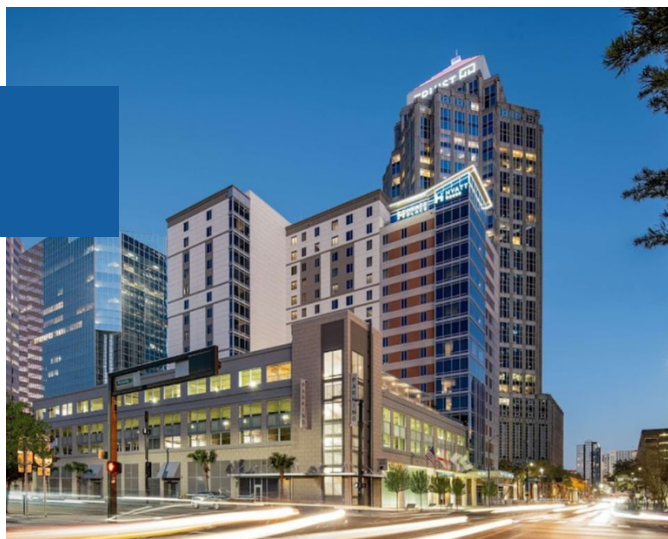
The Legislative Forum was held at the Old Capitol in Tallahassee at the end of January. We had an impressive 75 members attend this event. Our main priority was to meet with our legislators and educate them on our priority issues. We had CFO Jimmy Patronis and Agriculture Commissioner Nikki Fried speak in the morning and finished the day with a reception at the Governors Club.

APRIL

Our April Quarterly Meeting is April 22 in Tampa. A new feature this year is the Mental Health First Aid Course on April 21. It's open to all and is offered at no additional cost when registering.

[CLICK HERE TO REGISTER NOW](#)

This is a must-attend class where you will learn invaluable information to help recognize a potential mental health crisis in your employees.



JUNE

Reminder: June 13-16 is the Annual Conference being held at the Rosen Plaza Hotel in Orlando. This year's theme is Detecting the New Normal. Join us as we attempt to navigate post-COVID Florida while dressed to kill a la Miami Vice!

[CLICK HERE TO REGISTER NOW](#)



April Membership Meeting

Join us in Tampa where we will feature a new Mental Health First Aid Course!



April 21-22, 2022

Hyatt House Tampa Downtown

325 N Florida Ave, Tampa, FL 33602

What Is Being Offered:



Mental Health First Aid Course

See next page for
details

Generously Sponsored By:



2 Days of CDO Components/CEUs

visit www.fasd.com for a
detailed agenda

To Register
<< Click Here >>



MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID

WHY MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID?

Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) teaches you how to identify, understand and respond to signs of mental health and substance use challenges among adults.

On average,
130
people die by
suicide every day.

*Source: American Foundation
for Suicide Prevention*

From 1999 to 2019,
841,000
people died from
drug overdoses.

*Source: Centers for Disease
Control and Prevention*

Nearly
1 IN 5
in the U.S. lives
with a mental illness.

*Source: National Institute
of Mental Health*

WHO NEEDS TO KNOW MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID

- Employers.
- Police officers.
- Hospital staff.
- First responders.
- Caring individuals.

WHAT IT COVERS

- Common signs and symptoms of mental health challenges.
- Common signs and symptoms of substance use challenges.
- How to interact with a person in crisis.
- How to connect a person with help.
- Expanded content on trauma, substance use and self-care.

THREE WAYS TO LEARN

- **In-person** – Learners will receive their training as an 8-hour, Instructor-led, in-person course.
- **Blended** – Learners complete a 2-hour, self-paced online course, and participate in a 4.5- to 5.5-hour, Instructor-led training. This Instructor-led Training can be:
 - » A video conference.
 - » An in-person class.

Learn how to respond with the Mental Health First Aid Action Plan (**ALGEE**):

- A**ssess for risk of suicide or harm.
- L**isten nonjudgmentally.
- G**ive reassurance and information.
- E**ncourage appropriate professional help.
- E**ncourage self-help and other support strategies.

Sources

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. (n.d.). *Suicide statistics*.
<https://afsp.org/suicide-statistics/>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (n.d.) *Drug overdose deaths*. <https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/deaths/index.html>

National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH). (n.d.). *Mental illness*.
<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/mental-illness>

2022 FASD Annual Conference

FASD
UNDERCOVER
Detecting the New Normal

FASD



ROSEN PLAZA, ORLANDO FL

JUNE 13TH - 16TH, 2022

COACHING • MENTORING • TRAINING • TRUST

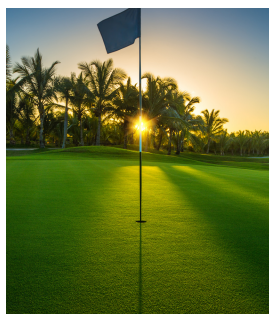
JOIN US IN ORLANDO

JUNE 13 - 16, 2022
ROSEN PLAZA HOTEL



EARLY BIRD REGISTRATION IS NOW OPEN

<<[Register now](#)>> to get the best prices. After May 6, registration fees will increase.



✓ *New* Classes
will be offered

✓ *New* Wednesday
Evening Event

✓ *New*
Sponsorship
Opportunities

✓ *New* Keynote
Speaker



☎ call or text 850-999-1937

🏠 120 S Monroe Street, Tallahassee, FL 32301

✉ rachel@fasd.com



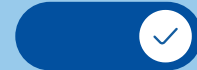
CALENDAR OF EVENTS



Dates to remember



April 21-22 // Quarterly Meeting



June 13-16 // Annual Conference



August 4 -5 // Board Member Meeting



October 20-21 // Quarterly Meeting



For more dates, check out our Upcoming Events page located <<[here](#)>> on the new website. The calendar contains all need-to-know dates for state compliance as well as Federal and FASD Board deadlines.



EDUCATION FOUNDATION

Thank you to The Founders' Circle Donors

President's Club



Gold Level



Silver Level



Rita Greenberg





MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Does Your Staff Really Know Their Benefits?

BY DATABASE FINANCIAL SERVICES, INC.

That's the question. Does your staff really understand all the benefits they have?

While traveling around different Districts, it is apparent that a lot do not. What are their benefits upon retirement? What happens should they die before reaching retirement? What is the benefit of their Deferred Compensation Plan?

How do I plan to get the most out of my retirement plan?

Most do not know the availability of using the deferred compensation plans before the age of 59 ½. The current IRS rule that allows or retirees to use up to \$3,000.00 per year to offset health insurance premiums tax free. How the new IRS rule effects qualified dollars upon the account owner's death. The role of life insurance in planning for retirement and the best option to take in their plan.

The other issue is the lack of service in quite few areas from the deferred compensation providers. A lot of participants have either never or for years looked at their risk tolerance compared to the funds selected in their plan. Those who do, usually pay a management fee to their provider.

At Database Financial Services, we have been answering these questions and a lot more for over 20 years. With our customized Retirement Education Seminars, we cover all the options available to staff in their individual plans. While also looking at why getting involved with their 457 programs can bridge the gap between retirement and Social Security. We also look at the importance of having a will or trust in your planning. We offer these educational seminars at no cost to the Districts.

In addition to the seminars, we are proud to have created the FASD Collective Deferred Compensation Program with Ameritas Financial, available to all Districts. This plan was built to offer the lowest cost to participants with no cost to the District. It also provides the participants advice on their fund selection at no cost.



The New Ameritas 457/401a Collective Plan for FASD Members

WHAT SETS US APART...

- ❖ A Broad Selection of Investment Options.
- ❖ 24/7 Access to your 457/401a account.
- ❖ D.F.S. Registered Representatives licensed to give Investment advice to Deferred Compensation Participants.
- ❖ No Cost Pre-Retirement & Post Retirement Counseling.
- ❖ On going Performance Reviews & individualized Counseling.
- ❖ Compare Your Plan to the Ameritas advantage.

**Call 1 800 210-0263
or e-mail cs457@mydfsfl.net
DATABASE FINANCIAL SERVICES, INC.**

3301 BONITA BEACH RD, SUITE 202, BONITA SPRINGS, FL 34134

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Grau & Associates is the leading provider of audit and attestation services to Florida government agencies, including: municipalities, special districts, and employee benefit plans and non-profit organizations and engineering firms.

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For over 25 years, the attorneys at LLW have helped individuals, businesses and governments that have shaped Florida's Future. They offer solutions to issues associated with complex local, state and federal laws and regulations.



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Lewis, Longman & Walker provides a wide array of general and special counsel services to special districts. We lobby before the Florida legislature to create special districts or to amend charters. We handle legal services related to financing for special districts working on bond issues, and handle all other day-to-day needs that arise. We advocate for our clients throughout the state, helping them navigate through the governmental and regulatory processes.

For more information, contact Chris Lyon
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MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

THE ECONOMY: A PROMISING, BUT COMPLICATED BACKDROP

BY WATER WALKER INVESTMENTS

Here in the U.S., we find ourselves in a unique economic landscape with a combination of a waning pandemic, rising inflationary pressures and an outlook for rapidly rising interest rates. Most economists agree that we are in what is known as a “mid-cycle expansion.”

This is typically the longest phase in the business cycle highlighted by moderate growth and is characterized by a combination of the following: peaking profits and growth, robust credit growth, neutral monetary policy, and strong inventory and sales growth.

Clearly, we do not have neutral monetary policy as the central bank is still very accommodative and interest rates are only just beginning to rise, but most other factors at least partially reflect our current situation.

INFLATION: THE TOPIC OF THE YEAR (SO FAR)

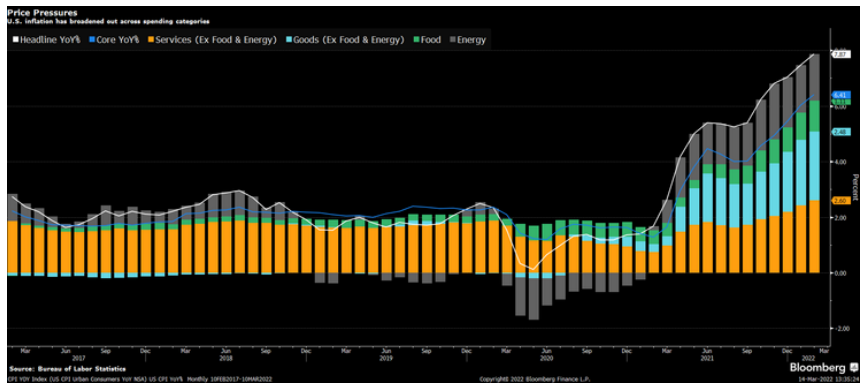
The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) data show that consumer price gains accelerated in February to a fresh 40-year high on rising gasoline, food, and housing costs. The chart below highlights how inflation ramped up in March of 2021 and has not looked back since. The rise in core prices (dark blue line), excluding food and energy are continuing to rise at an elevated pace above 6%, further indicating the breadth of price increases beyond commodities.

The February Consumer Price Index (CPI) report showed that gasoline prices climbed 6.6% from the prior month and accounted for almost a third of the monthly increase. Some of that may reflect energy price spikes resulting from the Russia/Ukraine war. The impact will be more fully captured in the March CPI report. Additionally, the CPI report showed that prices for merchandise continued their climb, while annual growth in services costs accelerated. On a year-over-year basis, inflation for goods rose by 13%, the most since 1980. Unsurprising to anyone who has recently stepped foot on a car lot, this figure includes the largest-ever annual increase in prices of new cars and trucks at +12.4%. While inflation in goods has been a hallmark of the post-pandemic recovery, new to the scene are costs of services, which increased 4.8% from a year ago, the biggest advance since 1991.

Inflation is mitigated when wages are rising faster, or at least on pace with prices. However, wage increases have not been keeping up with inflation. Inflation-adjusted average hourly earnings, aka “real earnings”, dropped 2.6% in February from a year earlier, the largest drop since May and the 11th straight decrease.

The consensus amongst economists polled by Bloomberg shows expectations for CPI to peak in Q2 of 2022 and gradually fall back towards the long-term trend of 2.5% by Q2 of 2023. Although this is a slower pace of normalization than many had initially hoped, this is not out of line with prior economic recoveries.

Inflation: Broadening Price Pressures



LOOKING FORWARD IN 2022

In conclusion, there is much to be optimistic about including expectations for continued economic expansion, but this is paired with rising prices and expectations for higher interest rates. Price increases are taking hold and policymakers will be keeping a close eye on inflation, especially as it affects consumer sentiment and spending. Local governments will need to keep a close eye on property values as interest rates rise;

rising mortgage rates typically slow down gains in housing prices and slow new property development, both of which could slow down gains in property tax receipts.

Additionally, governments across the country are faced with volatile weather patterns, which appear to be more extreme each year. Given the continued economic expansion, localities should continue planning for the next inevitable slowdown of tomorrow, despite the generally positive economic backdrop of today.



FASD MEMBER BENEFITS

Top Member Benefits When Joining FASD



Unlimited FDIC Insurance

Ameris Bank has developed a program to provide liquidity, competitive rates of returns, and access to multi-million dollar FDIC insurance on all member districts' cash and cash reserves.



Loan Assistance Program

This program provides FASD members with access to a professional services team to assist with analyzing and obtaining financing for new capital projects and/or refinancing via the bank loan market.



State and Federal Updates

On a weekly basis FASD provides our members with an exclusive overview of the most up-to-date important legislative action and activities in Tallahassee and Washington D.C.



Federal Grants Services

The National Special Districts Coalition (NSDC) is partnering with The Ferguson Group to provide grant services to its members. TFG has decades of experience to find funding for your priority projects.



The Quarterly Focus

This quarterly newsletter is the top source for information on Florida special districts news and resources. It is sent directly to district managers and officials who make the decisions. These managers, their staffs, and their members represent millions of dollars in sales opportunities.

FASD is continually searching to secure more benefits for our members, check back at www.fasd.com/member-benefits for the most up to date list of what we have to offer.



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Water Walker Investments is a Tampa-based SEC Registered Investment Advisor founded in 2000 specializing in treasury management consulting services, fixed income investment advisory, and consulting services to governmental clients statewide. The firm is also the investment manager to the US Fixed Income Trust (US-FIT) which oversees local government pools in Florida.



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DTA ensures that the right public financing programs are applied across the board to lower infrastructure and development costs, while building public improvements in a timely manner.



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Our Commitment to
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FREE INVESTMENT POLICY GUIDANCE	INVESTMENT ADVISORY SERVICES
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FASD MEMBER BENEFITS



FLORIDA ASSOCIATION OF SPECIAL DISTRICTS

MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS

Ameris Bank, in cooperation with The Florida Association of Special Districts, has developed a program to provide liquidity, competitive rates of returns and access to multi-million dollar FDIC insurance on all your district's cash and cash reserves. Click to learn more about the program.



HOW CAN YOUR SPECIAL DISTRICT BENEFIT?

Increase the interest that you earn and keep it! It is that easy. Find out how you can protect your large deposits with FDIC insurance while you earn interest. Watch the video below to see how this works.

WORK WITH A PARTNER YOU CAN TRUST.

This program was developed by listening to the needs of FASD members and gathering real feedback. We know that your time is valuable, and we are dedicated to providing you with solutions that fit your unique needs.

Get started by contacting an FASD Member Benefits Specialist.

Alex Milton

(D) 850.577.1281 | (C) 850.841.0776

alex.milton@amerisbank.com



FASD MEMBER BENEFITS



National
Purchasing
Partners
Government



Florida Association of Special Districts

Florida Association of Special Districts and NPPGov have partnered to offer members departmental and individual discounts from national brands.

As a member of the Florida Association of Special Districts, you have free access to NPPGov cooperative agreements.

Access NPPGov discounts at
nppgov.com/association/fasd



Questions or Concerns?

Contact NPPGov at 877.329.8847 or customerservice@nppgov.com.

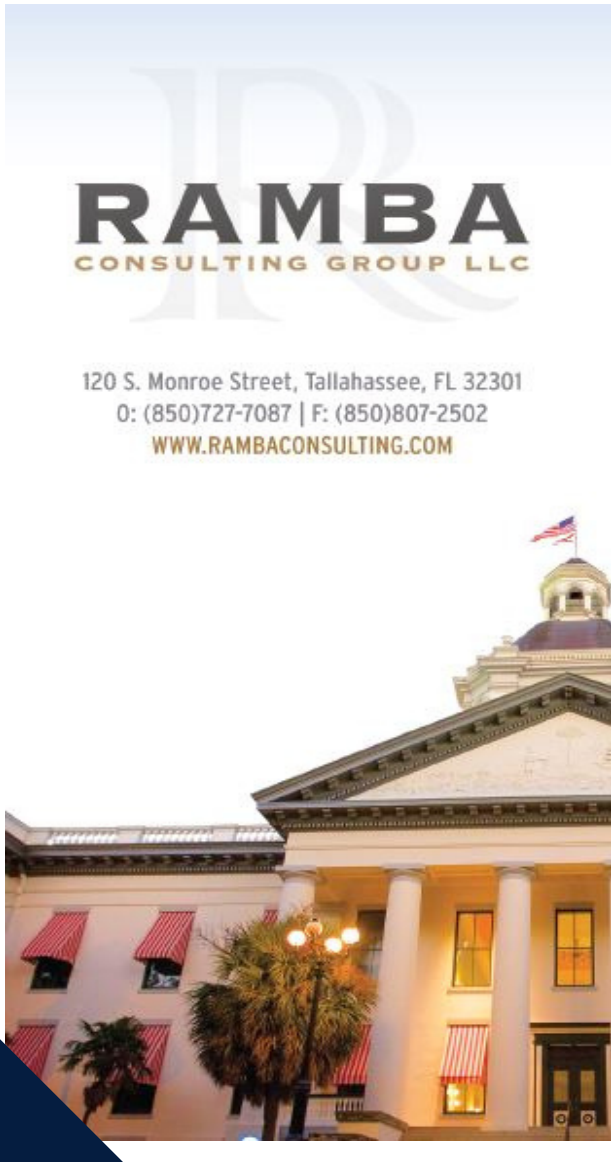
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STATE ADVOCACY



THE 10 BIGGEST ISSUES IN THE 2022 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Florida lawmakers finished the regular legislative session March 14 by passing a record \$112.1 billion budget for the fiscal year that will start July 1.

Here are snapshots of 10 big issues from the session:

— **ABORTION:** The Republican-controlled House and Senate passed a proposal that would prevent physicians from providing abortions after 15 weeks of pregnancy. The heavily debated proposal, which Gov. Ron DeSantis is expected to sign, is similar to a Mississippi law under review by the U.S. Supreme Court.

— **BUDGET:** Lawmakers passed a \$112.1 billion budget and a tax package that were bolstered by federal stimulus money and higher-than-expected state tax collections. The budget includes such things as funding increases for public schools and pay raises for state employees, while the state is slated to hold a series of sales-tax “holidays.”

— **EDUCATION:** Perhaps the session’s most-controversial bills involved restrictions on teaching about race-related issues, sexual orientation and gender identity in schools. Lawmakers passed a bill that is an outgrowth of DeSantis’ effort to bar critical race theory and passed a measure that opponents called the “don’t say gay” bill.

Session By The Numbers

3,735 Bills and PCBs filed

1,729 Appropriations Projects Filed

1,896 Amendments Filed

39 Floor Sessions

4,324 Votes Taken

285 Bills Passed Both Chambers



STATE ADVOCACY

(...continued from previous page)

— **ELECTIONS:** In the latest round of battles over elections laws, the House and Senate passed a measure that would create a new office in the Department of State to investigate voting irregularities. The bill also would ratchet up penalties for violating elections laws, such as what has become known as “ballot harvesting.”

— **HEALTH CARE:** Lawmakers passed a measure that would revamp staffing standards in nursing homes, as the industry says it faces worker shortages. Also, they passed — and DeSantis signed — a measure that extends COVID-19 legal protections for hospitals, nursing homes and other health-care providers to June 1, 2023.

— **IMMIGRATION:** Republican lawmakers backed DeSantis’ push to increase immigration enforcement. They passed a controversial bill that, in part, would penalize companies that transport undocumented immigrants into Florida. Also, the bill would expand a 2019 law that sought to ban so-called “sanctuary cities.”

— **LOCAL GOVERNMENTS:** In a closely watched issue for local governments, lawmakers passed a bill that could lead to businesses filing lawsuits against cities and counties if ordinances cause lost profits of 15 percent or more. The measure would apply to businesses that have been in operation for at least three years.

— **INSURANCE:** Lawmakers could not reach an agreement on a plan to address problems in the property-insurance industry, as homeowners see large rate increases and lose policies. Also, lawmakers scrapped proposals to repeal the state’s longstanding no-fault auto insurance system, after DeSantis vetoed a similar bill last year.

— **REDISTRICTING:** Lawmakers passed new maps for state House and Senate districts, but new congressional lines remain unresolved. DeSantis has vowed to veto a congressional plan passed by lawmakers, while pushing for changes that could be more favorable to Republicans. Lines need to be set by a June election qualifying period.

— **SOLAR POWER:** After heavy opposition from the solar industry and environmental groups, lawmakers passed a measure that would revamp rules for rooftop solar energy. Backers said the bill, which involved “net metering,” would phase out subsidies from other utility customers to rooftop solar owners, while critics said it would hurt the industry.

“Notwithstanding the delayed census, during the 2022 Regular Session, Florida’s Legislature passed new House and Senate maps with strong bipartisan support. For the first time in nearly a century, the Legislature’s maps were not challenged by a single party, and earlier this month were declared valid by the Florida Supreme Court.”

“Unlike state legislative maps, the congressional map requires approval by the Governor, and Governor DeSantis has vetoed the legislation we passed earlier this month. Our goal is for Florida to have a new congressional map passed by the Legislature, signed by the Governor, and upheld by the court if challenged. Therefore, it is incumbent upon us to exhaust every effort in pursuit of a legislative solution. We look forward to working with our colleagues and Governor DeSantis during the upcoming special session on a congressional map that will earn the support of the Legislature and the Governor and fulfill our constitutional obligation for the 2022 redistricting process.”

JOINT STATEMENT ON 2022 REDISTRICTING

Florida House Speaker Chris Sprowls and Senate President Wilton Simpson issued the following joint statement regarding redistricting:

**Special Session:
April 19 - 22, 2022**



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MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

The Importance of Motor Vehicle Record Reviews as Part of your Driver Safety Program

By Ryan Rupnarain, Egis Insurance & Risk Advisors

While there are a variety of operational focuses within the spectrum of Florida's special taxing districts, most rely on some form of vehicular operations. Driving district-owned vehicles, or even employee-owned vehicles for district business whether on a regular or occasional basis does not come without an added risk exposure. Automobile accidents can be a significant liability for districts that rely on the use of vehicles for their operations.

Fortunately, a well-managed driver safety program including training, vehicle inspection and maintenance, and driver selection criteria can be very helpful in managing this risk. The exposure has seen an uptick in recent years due in large part to distracted driving and a legal concept called negligent entrustment.

Negligent entrustment occurs when an employer is held liable for negligence in choosing an employee to operate a dangerous instrument, typically a vehicle, regardless of whether the employer owns the vehicle. An employer, or district in this case, can be found negligent if both of the following situations occur:

- An employee driving on district business causes injury to a third party or damages physical property, even if the employee is not the at fault party.



- The district knew, or should have known, not to trust the vehicle to the driver or that the vehicle was unsafe.

If a driver is working within the scope of his or her job duties, including running an errand on behalf of the district, it is presumed that the employer has trusted the driver with the vehicle. Districts should be able to show that they took all possible precautions to prevent accidents. If not, the actions they did or did not take may be construed as negligent entrustment.

That is where motor vehicle records (MVRs) can help. The rest of this article will provide an overview of MVRs, how and why to obtain them, and what to look for once you have secured them.

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

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What Are MVRs?

Put simply, MVRs are historical driving records that districts can use to evaluate current and potential drivers. Specifically, MVRs provide an overview of an individual's:

- Driving history over a specific period, usually several years
- Moving violations
- Chargeable accidents
- DUI offenses
- Suspensions or revocations
- Point accumulations
- Driver's license and restrictions
- Vehicular crimes

This information is crucial for public entities, as an individual's accident and violation history are a good indicator of their driving performance and habits. Studies indicate that drivers with a poor record are more likely to be involved in future incidents.

By obtaining and reviewing MVRs for employees who drive, you are ensuring the individuals you hire are able to perform their job duties safely, helping you reduce the likelihood of vehicle accidents.

How to Obtain MVRs and What to Look For

When it comes to obtaining MVRs, districts have several options. Specifically, you can secure an MVR through:

- The state's department of motor vehicles
- A third-party service: [FLHSMV List of Third Party Record Providers](#)

MVRs can be obtained through one of the above sources. While insurance agents and carriers may request driving records, it is typically only for underwriting purposes. It is still up to the district to determine driver eligibility for their respective operations.



Before you request a current or prospective employee's MVR, you must first obtain their written consent. MVRs should be reviewed before making a hiring decision and at least annually thereafter.



MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

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For workers whose roles include driving as a key component, acceptable MVRs should be a condition of employment. The definition of an acceptable MVR can differ from district to district, but it is important to set clear standards that employees can understand. Some general guidelines to consider include the following:

- The current or prospective employee must have a valid driver's license for the state in which they reside.
- The current or prospective employee should have at least five years of driving experience.
- The current or prospective employee should not have any serious violations in the last three to five years. Examples of serious violations can vary by state but may include:
 - Speeding excessively (e.g., driving 15 mph faster than the posted speed limit).
 - Operating a vehicle under the influence of alcohol or narcotics. It should be noted that refusing to take a chemical test can also qualify as a serious violation.
 - Passing a stopped school bus.
 - Driving with a suspended, revoked, or invalid license.
 - Driving recklessly or negligently. Drivers involved in vehicular assault, homicide or manslaughter should be disqualified from employment.
 - Fleeing the scene of an accident (e.g., hit and run incidents).
- The current or prospective employee should not have:
 - Three or more moving violations within the last three years (e.g., speeding, changing lanes improperly, running a red light or failing to yield)
 - Two or more at-fault accidents within the last three years (e.g., accidents where the driver receives a citation or causes a collision due to their negligence)
 - More than one at-fault accident and one moving violation combined within the last three years

Having a consistent system for collecting, retaining, and reviewing MVRs can go a long way toward hiring qualified drivers and preventing accidents and is an important part of a district's overall fleet and driver risk management program. In future articles, we will highlight other key components of a good program including vehicle inspection and maintenance, driver training, and more.



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AROUND THE DISTRICTS

April is National Distracted Driving Awareness Month

By East Lake Fire Rescue

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, checking a text message while driving at 55 mph is the equivalent of driving the length of a football field with your eyes closed.

Distracted driving comes in multiple forms: Texting while driving is the most commonly reported but distracted driving also includes anything that takes your eyes off the road such as checking social media, eating, drinking, watching a video, reading, talking to people in your car, checking your GPS, grooming, fiddling with your AC, picking a different song on your phone or radio. Anything that takes your eyes off the road and/or your hands off the wheel is distracted driving.

According to the Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles (FLHSMV), there were nearly 48,500 distracted driving crashes in 2021 in Florida alone. Those collisions killed 300 people and left 2,700 more with serious bodily injuries. 90% of teens admit to using their smartphone while driving in some capacity. But don't think this is only a generational problem, because it's not.

Florida Department of Transportation officials are making an effort to reduce these accidents across the state, including:

- Increasing distracted driving awareness and prevention among the public
- Encouraging employers and entities to adopt distracted driving policies
- Supporting legislation to enhance distracted driving laws
- Increasing knowledge among law enforcement officers on the investigation and data collection at distracted driving accident scenes
- Educating law enforcement and others on existing laws (like careless driving) that can be applied in distracted driving cases
- Launching distracted driving enforcement campaigns
- Supporting Graduated Driver's License restrictions for teen drivers

State and national officials can only do so much when it comes to making people put down their phones. Ultimately distracted driving prevention begins and ends with the drivers themselves.

For more information on distracted driving, please visit: <https://www.nhtsa.gov/risky-driving/distracted-driving>



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MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Hurricane-scaping: Making Your Landscaping Storm Wise

by Public Risk Underwriters of Florida, Inc.

With the recent years of hurricane activities, serious consideration should be given to hurricane-scaping landscaping. Hurricane-scaping is a process of taking the necessary steps to modify your landscaping to reduce storm damage. The process consists of selecting storm wise trees, addressing inland flooding/storm surge exposures to your landscaping as well as providing ongoing landscape maintenance.

Post storm analysis indicates that native trees/shrubs that are even branched with low centers of gravity and have deep root systems fare better in hurricane-force winds. Species like sea grapes and gumbo limbo quickly shed their leaves in hurricane-force winds, but the structures of these even-branched trees tend to remain intact and the foliage quickly re-grows. Native palms such as coconut, cabbage and thatch palms are also highly adapted to strong winds and are known to survive unscathed.

When planting trees one should consider their eventual size to avoid future conflicts with buildings, fences and power lines. Mature tree height is extremely important to consider under power lines. When trees are allowed to grow into power lines, they pose a year-round maintenance issue for the power company and increase the chances that power will be interrupted after a storm.



Flood tolerance and local storm-surge potential should also be taken into consideration. If areas are prone to inland flooding select landscaping that is flood-tolerant. For coastal landscaping you need to consider the possibility of a storm surge that could bring large amounts of salt water inland. Selection of salt-tolerant species such as coconut palms, sea grape and gumbo limbo can be utilized to minimize post-storm damage.



MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

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As part of an overall landscape maintenance plan pre/post storm preparation activities are equally important. That being said, it is always recommended to work with a Certified Arborist in planning for hurricane season to determine what needs to be completed pre/post hurricane. In advance of hurricane season brown fronds and seed pods on palms should be removed along with coconuts and harvest items, i.e. fruits, which are mature enough to pick. In addition, provide for the staking of small trees to secure them against heavy winds.

Subsequent to a hurricane, take time to properly assess landscaping damage. Secure and/or remove hazards and consider delaying the pruning and removal of trees and shrubs for as long as possible. The damage to the landscaping may look severe initially, but wind-whipped trees and shrubs can improve in appearance in a matter of months. When dealing with flooded areas, check the drainage system to remove any blockage to assist in reducing further damage to water-intolerant species.

Please refer to the Storm-Wise Landscaping table below to help you learn more about landscaping that is better suited to survive hurricanes:

Plant Type	Wind Tolerance	Flood Tolerance	Salt Tolerance	Mature Size (H x W)
Jamaican Caper	Medium	Medium	High	10' x 4'
Royal Palm	High	High	Medium	80' x 7'
Red Bay	Medium	High	Low	40' x 30'
Buttonwood	High	High	High	20' x 25'
Black Ironwood	High	Medium	Medium	25' x 10'
Pond Apple	Medium	High	Low	20' x 15'
Dahoon Holly	Medium	High	Low	25' x 15'
Cabbage Palm	High	High	High	40' x 5'
Sea Grape	Medium-High	Medium	High	30' x 25'
Gumbo Limbo	Medium-High	Medium	High	40' x 35'
Live Oak	High	Medium	Low	60' x 40'
Cypress	Medium	High	Low	80' x 25'
Coconut Palm	High	Medium	High	60' x 5'
Florida Thatch Palm	High	Medium	High	20' x 3'





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