

**OFFICIAL MEETING MINUTES  
OF THE  
LEGISLATIVE DELEGATION  
LOCAL BILL AND PUBLIC HEARING  
PALM BEACH COUNTY, FLORIDA**

**JANUARY 12, 2023**

**THURSDAY  
1:30 P.M.**

**ELS CENTER OF EXCELLENCE  
JUPITER, FLORIDA**

**LEGISLATIVE DELEGATION (DELEGATION) MEMBERS:**

State Senator Tina Polsky, Chair  
State Senator Gayle Harrell, Vice Chair  
State Senator Lori Berman  
State Representative Mike Caruso  
State Representative Joseph Casello  
State Representative Jervonte Edmonds  
State Representative Peggy Gossett-Seidman  
State Senator Bobby Powell Jr.  
State Representative Rick Roth  
State Representative David Silvers  
State Representative Kelly Skidmore  
State Representative Emily Slosberg  
State Representative John Snyder  
State Representative Katherine Waldron

**COUNTY STAFF PRESENT:**

Genaya Mercado, Delegation Aide, Palm Beach County Legislative Delegation  
Victoria Nowlan, Executive Director, Palm Beach County Legislative Delegation

**CLERK OF THE CIRCUIT COURT & COMPTROLLER'S OFFICE STAFF PRESENT:**

Danielle Freeman, Deputy Clerk  
Jillian Zalewska, Deputy Clerk

**I. Call to Order**

The chair called the meeting to order at 1:32 p.m.

**II. Pledge of Allegiance**

(CLERK'S NOTE: This item was not taken up.)

**III. Member Introductions**

(CLERK'S NOTE: Member self-introductions took place at this time.)

**IV. Welcome Remarks By:**

1. Chairwoman Tina Polsky, Palm Beach County Legislative Delegation

(CLERK’S NOTE: Item IV.3 was taken up at this time.)

3. Marlene Sotelo, Els Center for Autism Foundation, Els Center of Excellence

Dr. Sotelo acknowledged Liezl and Ernie Els, who had established the Els for Autism Foundation in 2009. She provided details about the programs and services offered at the Els Center, as well as plans for growth.

At Dr. Sotelo’s invitation, an individual receiving services at the Els Center briefly addressed the attendees.

(CLERK’S NOTE: Item IV.2 was taken up at this time.)

2. Maria Marino, Commissioner, District 1 (Video)

(CLERK’S NOTE: A video was played at this time.)

**UNSCHEDULED ITEM**

(CLERK’S NOTE: The roll call was conducted at this time.)

**Present:** Sen. Berman, Sen. Harrell, Sen. Polsky, Sen. Powell, Rep. Caruso, Rep. Casello, Rep. Gossett-Seidman, Rep. Roth, Rep. Skidmore, Rep. Snyder, and Rep. Waldron

**Absent:** Rep. Edmonds, Rep. Silvers, and Rep. Slosberg

Delegation Executive Director Victoria Nowlan indicated that a quorum was present.

Sen. Polsky acknowledged several elected officials who were present in the audience.

**V. Constitutional Officers**

1. Allison Novoa, Public Information Officer and Director of Strategic Initiatives, Supervisor of Elections (SOE)

Ms. Novoa stated that she was speaking on behalf of SOE Wendy Sartory Link, who was attending an out-of-state conference. She said that the office’s mission was to ensure that every eligible citizen in Palm Beach County registered to vote and that every eligible vote was counted accurately and in a timely manner. She explained that because of the current law allowing three different voting methods, Florida provided a

gold standard and nationwide model for election administration and the accurate and timely reporting of election results

Ms. Novoa said that implementation of Section 31 of proposed Senate Bill 524, which would require voters to include identifiable personal information on vote-by-mail ballots, would prevent the timely reporting of results on election night. She requested that the Delegation review the work group report produced by the State SOE. Ms. Novoa also said that the State SOEs might request clarification regarding the public inspection process.

She requested that the Delegation contact the SOE's office with any questions.

## **VI. Presenters**

1. Dr. Stacy Volnik, Interim President, Florida Atlantic University (FAU)

Dr. Volnik spoke about FAU's 2023 legislative agenda, which was centered around health care initiatives. She stated that FAU would be submitting a request for funding for its proposed college of dentistry and requests to increase enrollments in its colleges of medicine and nursing.

2. Dr. Debra A. Schwinn, President, Palm Beach Atlantic University (PBA)

Dr. Schwinn discussed PBA's plans for a new building within the business school that would house a center for financial literacy.

3. Larry Rein, CEO and President, ChildNet, Inc.

Mr. Rein discussed child welfare funding needs.

Responding to a question from Sen. Berman, Mr. Rein discussed the case of a child in foster care who fell victim to human trafficking.

4. Rich Bartholomew, League of Women Voters of Palm Beach County

Mr. Bartholomew discussed his organization's support of positive local initiatives at all levels of government.

5. Jonathan Ortiz-Smykla, Chief Advancement Officer, Center for Creative Education

Mr. Ortiz-Smykla requested State appropriation funding for a new arts and science center to serve the community with after-school programs, as a host for arts and culture events, as a field trip destination, and as a community hub with meeting spaces.

6. Terry Ann Paulo, Disaster Economic Recovery Coordinator, Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council

Ms. Paulo requested support for resolutions regarding water resources and affordable housing. She also discussed the availability of Brownfields funding.

7. Gail Ladd, Loxahatchee Group of the Florida Sierra Club

Ms. Ladd asked that the Delegation promote policies and funding to protect waterways, encourage non-fossil fuel energy production, and facilitate green harvesting of sugarcane.

8. Rena Taylor, Supervising Attorney, Legal Aid Society of Palm Beach County, Public Guardianship Program

Ms. Taylor requested that the Delegation maintain the base recurring general revenue funding in the health care appropriations budget and asked for support of legislation that would support end-of-life care for wards of the State.

In response to a question posed by Rep. Edmonds, Ms. Taylor said that approximately 3,000 individuals had been served by the program statewide.

Rep. Skidmore requested that Ms. Taylor meet with her office to discuss the end-of-life care proposal.

Rep. Caruso stated that he was filing a guardianship bill and asked Ms. Taylor to meet with this staff to review the wording of the bill.

9. Sharon L'Herrou, President/CEO, 211 Palm Beach & Treasure Coast Building

Ms. L'Herrou asked that the Delegation support her organization's \$2 million appropriations request to fund a new building and address a dramatic increase in the need for services.

10. Marilyn Ricci, LWV Palm Beach & Florida Mental Health Advocacy Coalition

Ms. Ricci discussed the new national 988 number, which provided support for individuals experiencing mental health crises.

11. Dave Lawrence, President, Cultural Council of Palm Beach County

Mr. Lawrence discussed the organization's mission and asked that the Delegation support the Cultural Council's funding requests.

12. Andrea Virgin, PE, LEED AP, President & Chair of the Board, The Center for Arts & Innovation, Inc.

Ms. Virgin requested Delegation support for the organization's objectives.

13. Marsha Martino, Treasurer, Florida Mental Health Advocacy Coalition

Ms. Martino discussed the 988 mental health crisis hotline and asked the Delegation to support efforts to expand the community-based crisis response system.

14. Emerson Ferry, Sophia Antoni and Lily Demara, Coalition Against Period Poverty

The speakers requested support for a bill that would require provision of menstrual products in school restrooms at no cost to students.

15. Raphael Clemente, West Palm Beach Downtown Development Authority

Mr. Clemente spoke about the homelessness crisis in West Palm Beach and asked the Delegation to support policies that addressed mental health, housing affordability, and the ability of the criminal justice and judicial systems to manage those issues effectively.

16. Andrew Kato, Maltz Jupiter Theatre

Mr. Kato discussed the importance of continued funding for the arts.

17. Jason Morales, SEIU-1199, Healthcare Workers East

The speaker was not present.

18. Karen Moran, Florida Citizens Alliance – Save Our Schools America

Ms. Moran requested Delegation support for school choice measures and efforts to protect minors from harmful materials.

19. Linda Smithe, Sierra Club, Loxahatchee Group

Ms. Smith asked the Delegation to enhance the legislative commitment to preservation and spoke in opposition to seagrass banking and the burning of sugarcane. She also discussed Broward County's resolution to reduce plastic waste on County properties and requested support for House Bill 91, a balloon-release ban, and expansion of the land acquisition trust fund.

## **VII. Public Comment**

Marc Hopin, the CEO of Alpert Jewish Family Service, discussed requests for support for mental health services and programs serving older adults. He also expressed interest in collaborating with The Lord's Place to address homelessness.

Michelle Kennedy, Circuit Director of the Guardian Ad Litem office, spoke about the need for volunteers.

Henry Ponciano discussed The Arc of Palm Beach County, a disability services and support organization.

Dwight Mattingly spoke about the need for qualified CDL drivers to serve public transit needs. He requested that the Delegation oppose any legislation that would limit union representation for public workers.

## **RECESS**

**At 3:09 p.m., the chair declared the meeting recessed.**

## **RECONVENE**

**At 3:18 p.m., the meeting reconvened.**

(CLERK'S NOTE: A role call was conducted at this time.)

**Present:** Sen. Berman, Sen. Harrell, Sen. Polsky, Sen. Powell, Rep. Caruso, Rep. Casello, Rep. Gossett-Seidman, Rep. Roth, Rep. Skidmore, Rep. Snyder, and Rep. Waldron

**Absent:** Rep. Edmonds, Rep. Silvers, and Rep. Slosberg

(CLERK'S NOTE: Rep. Edmonds joined the meeting after the roll call.)

Ms. Nowlan indicated that a quorum was present.

## **VIII. Local Bills**

1. Boca Raton Airport Authority – Rep. Peggy Gossett-Seidman

Chris Lyon of Lewis, Longman & Walker discussed the review that had been conducted of the Boca Raton Airport Authority's charter and explained that the attorneys had modernized the special act. He noted that an amended bill had been submitted.

In response to a question posed by Rep. Caruso, Mr. Lyon explained that the amended bill reflected a compromise reached with the City of Boca Raton relating to the voting threshold necessary to hire or fire the airport's executive director.

Rep. Edmonds inquired about compensation for board members, and Mr. Lyon stated that members were compensated at a rate of \$250 a meeting with an annual cap of \$3,000.

Discussion ensued regarding the bill.

**MOTION to approve the local bill. Motion by Rep. Casello, seconded by Rep. Skidmore.**

**BY WAY OF A ROLL CALL VOTE, the motion carried 12-0.**

2. Jupiter Inlet District – Rep. John Snyder

Richard Pinsky, public policy manager with Akerman, delivered a presentation about the bill. He explained that the Jupiter Inlet commissioners had restructured the charter according to subject area and made the following changes:

- verbiage regarding the district’s purpose had been restated;
- the cap on the millage rate had been reduced to 1.5 from 3;
- unnecessary language had been removed;
- a modest cost of living increase had been implemented; and
- a mandated annual audit was codified in the charter.

In response to a question posed by Rep. Roth about the district’s right to review dock permits, Mr. Pinsky explained that the commission could review and comment on Department of Environment Protection permits but could not oppose them.

**PUBLIC COMMENT:** George Gentile

**MOTION to approve the local bill. Motion by Rep. Waldron, seconded by Sen. Harrell.**

**BY WAY OF A ROLL CALL VOTE, the motion carried 12-0.**

3. Wellington – Acme Improvement District – Rep. Katherine Waldron

Laurie Cohen, Village of Wellington, delivered a video presentation outlining the details of the bill.

**MOTION to approve the local bill. Motion by Rep. Snyder, seconded by Rep. Caruso.**

**BY WAY OF A ROLL CALL VOTE, the motion carried 12-0.**

**MOTION to extend the meeting until 4:30 p.m. Motion by Rep. Caruso, seconded by Rep. Casello.**

(CLERK'S NOTE: No vote was taken.)

(CLERK'S NOTE: Item 5 was taken up at this time.)

5. Village of Loxahatchee – Rep. Rick Roth

Rep. Roth provided an overview of the bill, which would provide an opportunity to create the Village of Loxahatchee through a referendum process. He read portions of the bill's charter into the record.

a. Public Comment

i. Christy L. Peterson

Ms. Peterson expressed opposition to the bill and stated that the feasibility study was flawed.

ii. Lynda Walker

Ms. Walker discussed flaws in the feasibility study and her opposition to the bill.

iii. P. Skoran

Ms. Skoran stated that she was in favor of holding the referendum and spoke about elements of the feasibility study.

iv. Kent Nelson

Mr. Nelson discussed concerns regarding gentrification in the Loxahatchee area and requested that the Delegation allow the referendum to take place.

v. Grissel Ramos

Ms. Ramos stated that residents should have the right to vote on the proposed incorporation.

vi. Jay Sweet

Mr. Sweet discussed self-determination and requested that residents be given the opportunity to vote in the referendum.

vii. Dennis Hawkins



Mr. Hawkins spoke about the incorporation packet and expressed disagreement with the choice of the name "Village of Loxahatchee." He stated that he was opposed to the local bill.

viii. Karen Mehnk (last name illegible)

The speaker expressed opposition to the local bill.

ix. Suzanne Parenteau

Ms. Parenteau stated that residents should have the right to vote in the referendum.

x. Commissioner Sara Baxter

Commissioner Baxter expressed support for allowing residents to vote in a referendum.

**MOTION to approve the local bill. Motion by Rep. Casello, seconded by Rep. Caruso.**

Discussion ensued regarding the bill.

**BY WAY OF A ROLL CALL VOTE, the motion carried 12-0.**

(CLERK'S NOTE: Item 4 was taken up at this time.)

4. Indian Trails Improvement District – Rep. Rick Roth

Rep. Roth withdrew the Indian Trails Improvement District bill.

a. Public Comment

There was no public comment.

i. Christy L. Peterson

ii. Lynda Walker

## **IX. ADJOURNMENT**

**At 4:19 p.m., the chair declared the meeting adjourned.**

APPROVED:

---

Chair/Vice Chair