

JUNE 29, 2026 | NEWS

Shumaker School Funding Lawsuit Sparks Statewide Reform Across Florida

SARASOTA, FL — Shumaker attorneys successfully led a groundbreaking legal challenge on behalf of the Sarasota County School Board and taxpayers that has resulted in sweeping statewide legislative reform protecting tens of millions of dollars in voter-approved education funding for Florida’s public schools.

The passage of HB 7031E by the Florida Legislature, which contained a revision to Florida Statute Sect. 192.091 governing how tax collectors take commissions follows litigation spearheaded by Shumaker Partner Daniel DeLeo, Associate Raven Peters, and his legal team, after the Sarasota County Tax Collector unilaterally began withholding commissions from a voter-approved school millage referendum, diverting funds intended for classrooms, teachers, school safety, and educational programs.

What began as a local dispute with the Sarasota County Tax Collector to recover millions of dollars wrongfully taken from Sarasota schools has now produced a statewide solution to a growing statewide problem, impacting 28 other Florida school districts and potentially all 67 Florida school districts.

“This case was about protecting the will of the voters and ensuring that taxpayer directed dollars reach the classrooms and students they were intended to support,” said DeLeo, Partner at Shumaker and lead counsel for the Sarasota County School Board. “The Legislature’s action confirms what we argued from the beginning—that these education funds should not be diverted away from their intended purpose.”

For more than 23 years, Sarasota County had covered the cost of collecting the voter-approved school millage. That longstanding practice changed when the Sarasota Tax Collector, Mike Moran, adopted a new and self-serving interpretation of Florida law and began withholding millions of dollars of the referendum proceeds as a commission.

In response, the Sarasota County School Board and two taxpayers filed suit seeking to halt what it viewed as an unlawful diversion of public education funds.

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The litigation achieved several significant outcomes:

- Recovery of more than \$2 million that had been improperly withheld from Sarasota County Schools and restoration of those funds to educational purposes.
- Reversal of the Sarasota County Commission's decision to discontinue covering the commission costs associated with the voter-approved school millage.
- Legislative clarification through HB 7031E establishing that commissions on school millages are the responsibility of county commissions, not school districts.
- Confirmation that tax collectors may waive such commissions entirely, ensuring voter-approved school funding can be directed fully toward education.

The legislation's impact extends far beyond Sarasota County. By clarifying the law statewide, HB 7031E is expected to preserve tens of millions of dollars annually for Florida's public schools rather than allowing those funds to be diverted to the budget of Tax Collectors.

In Sarasota County alone, the financial impact over the next five years is approximately \$10 million dollars.

"The significance of this victory reaches every corner of Florida," DeLeo said. "This litigation not only protected Sarasota taxpayers and students, but it also established clarity that benefits every school district in the state. At a time when Florida schools are facing a number of financial challenges, this is a huge win. It's a powerful example of how strategic litigation can create meaningful public policy reform."

In addition to Dan DeLeo and Raven Peters, other colleagues involved in the matter included attorneys Jon Skelton, Chloe Denney, and Jeremy Halpern. The team was further supported by paralegal Sara McClellan and legal administrative assistant Meg Pack.

The legislation will take effect July 1, 2026.