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## Client Alert: Florida's 2022 Legislative Session Update

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Florida's 2022 Legislative Session begins on Tuesday, January 11<sup>th</sup> and is scheduled to conclude by March 11<sup>th</sup>. As the Session draws closer, nearly 3,000 bills have been filed between the House and Senate, of which 1,600 are appropriations projects vying for consideration in the budget. Of the roughly 1,500 policy bills filed, it is likely that around one-fifth will reach Governor DeSantis for approval or veto. Of the 1,700 non-appropriations bills filed last year, 275 were approved by both chambers and presented to the Governor, 265 of which were signed into law.

### Policy

With session beginning in less than one week, top priorities are expected to include pandemic-related legislation, workforce, education, and health care needs. Numerous bills have been filed relating specifically to the pandemic, including extended liability protections for health care providers and additional prohibitions on mask and vaccine requirements for municipalities.

Following a year of record graduation rates across the state and implementation of landmark educational programs, the Legislature will continue to pursue improvements to Florida's education system in 2022. Last year, legislation targeting increased literacy rates, school readiness rates, and workforce education sailed through the legislative process, providing Florida's students new pathways to success through programs, such as the New Worlds Reading Initiative, the Reading Achievement Initiative for Scholastic Excellence (RAISE), and the Reimagining Education and Career Help (REACH) Act. These programs, in conjunction with budget initiatives and other legislation, seek to bring Florida's education programs to the top of the nation in terms of student success and workforce readiness. Continuing in these efforts this year, the focus points of education-related legislation include school choice and school safety. The Republican-lead Legislature has continually emphasized its commitment to increased school choice and access to charter schools, and will continue to push this priority during the upcoming Session to allow students the opportunity to learn in an environment best suited to their needs. Other bills to be considered propose changes, such as social media literacy instruction, increased emphasis on student mental health and related services, required curriculum on diverse communities, and reinstatement of partisan school board elections.

In the health care space, lawmakers are expected to face long-debated issues, including abortion restrictions and marijuana. Several bills have been filed relating to both. One proposed bill would legalize recreational marijuana use in Florida, and several others seek to modernize the regulatory landscape of medical

cannabis. Across the U.S., many states are engaged in conversations about the future of abortion restrictions in the wake of controversial legislation passed in Texas and Mississippi, among other states, and the legal questions that have followed. Continuing the momentum from previous years, the Legislature will also hear a number of bills regarding mental health and substance abuse. Increasing access to and improving quality of care for individuals affected by mental health and substance abuse disorders was a prominent theme of last year's health care conversations, and the same will likely be true this year. Additionally, changes to the state's practices surrounding telehealth are once again up for consideration in spite of their failure to reach the Governor's desk last session.

A key priority for Governor DeSantis has been environmental protection and restoration, which will again be at the forefront of the Legislature's work. Bills in the environment silo to be considered this year include further implementation of the recommendations of the Blue-Green Algae Task Force, water quality improvement and water resource preservation, resiliency programs, improvements to energy efficiency, and efforts to decrease the production and presence of harmful pollutants.

### Redistricting

Alongside their usual tasks of passing legislation and crafting the state budget, legislators are also responsible for updating state and federal districts to align with Census data gathered in 2020. Florida experienced a record 14.6 percent population growth between 2010 and 2020, affording the state an additional seat in the U.S. House of Representatives and requiring modification of current district lines to account for uneven growth in particular areas of the state. The I-4 corridor, for example, experienced the largest proportion of growth in the state, with The Villages experiencing the largest growth of any area across the country. House and Senate Redistricting committees met several times throughout the six interim committee weeks leading up to session, and began reviewing map proposals in November. Conflict is likely to arise in districts where incumbents could be pitted against one another in upcoming elections. The Legislature must jointly approve new maps by Sine Die on March 11<sup>th</sup>, or they will be required to reconvene for a Special Session.

### Budget

Governor DeSantis released his Freedom First Budget recommendation in early December, highlighting his priorities for funding Fiscal Year 2022-2023, which begins July 1, 2022. On par with previous years, the Governor has re-emphasized his commitments to education, environment, and public safety in this year's proposal. The Governor's proposal totals \$99.7 billion, and recommends a record-level allocation to the State's reserve funds. Although the Legislature will consider the proposal in their own budgeting process, they will inevitably make some adjustments. House and Senate Appropriations Committee leaders, along with selected joint committee members, will meet later in Session to craft appropriations bills and make decisions on funding for specific projects within each silo. From there, conference offers from each chamber will be made until each line item is agreed upon. The final budget must be approved by both chambers by the end of Session, when the Governor will have the opportunity to review allocations and veto line items as he sees fit.

Highlights of the Governor's proposed budget can be viewed [here](#).

**Please reach out to any of the Shumaker Advisors should you have any questions.**

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