

FECA's Florida Legislative Report

February 21, 2025

The opening day of the 2025 Legislative Session is scheduled for Tuesday, March 4, 2025. Today concludes the sixth and final committee week for both the House and Senate. Members will return to their respective districts next week ahead of the upcoming 60-day "marathon." The bill filing deadline for House members is 5:00 PM Friday, February 28, while Senators have until noon on March 4. Legislators are accelerating the pace of filing new bills which will continue between now and the filing deadlines. Committee meetings this week consisted of presentations and work groups, while very few policy related bills were heard.

Several bills of interest were filed this week. First, Rep. Kincart Jonsson filed HB 857, relating to Assault or Battery on a Utility Worker. The bill increases the penalties for assault, battery, or aggravated assault committed against a utility worker. A Senate companion bill has not yet been filed. Additionally, Sen. McClain filed SB 818 relating to Utility Relocation (attached). The House companion, HB 703 by Rep. Robinson (W.) was filed simultaneously. The bill requires utilities to submit a relocation schedule within 30 days and begin relocation work within 60 days of notification of utility facilities interfering with the use, maintenance, or expansion of a publicly owned right of way. It also states if a broadband, cable, or video service provider is required to relocate a facility, the government entity requiring the relocation must pay the expenses attributed to the work. **Please review the 30 and 60 days' notice provisions with your team. If you see any negative impacts, please send them to Drew (drew@feca.com).**

Last week, SB 700 by Sen. Truenow and HB 651 by Rep. Tuck, relating to the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, were filed. As currently written, the bill poses significant concerns for electric co-ops, and staff has expressed these concerns with the bill sponsors. Neither bill has received committee references at this point, but our issues have been noted. We will continue to work with the sponsors, the Commissioner of Agriculture, and our industry partners to address these issues.

Senate President Albritton has made rural communities a priority for his tenure. This priority took shape in Sen. Simon's SB 110 relating to Rural Communities. The 129-page proposal is intended to assist rural communities and enhance health care, education, infrastructure, and economic development for 31 counties across the state. Currently, the bill does not directly impact electric cooperatives. We will continue to monitor as it evolves.

Below are bills of interest filed thus far. Moving forward each successive week, the report will be prioritized in the following manner: new legislation filed, priority, monitor, and tracking. Any new activities will be highlighted in **RED**. If you would like more detailed information or an explanation of any legislation or why it is located in a specific area, please do not hesitate to reach out to Drew or Mike.

NEW LEGISLATION FILED

Assault or Battery on a Utility Worker

(SB __/HB 857)

Sponsors: Sen. __/Rep. Kincart Jonsson

Summary:

The bill increases penalties for criminal offenses committed against utility workers during their duty, including upgrading assault to a first-degree misdemeanor and battery or aggravated assault to a felony. It defines "utility worker," for the purposes of this law, as an employee or contractor visibly identified by a patch, emblem, or identification that links them to their utility, including those in electricity, gas, water, wastewater, telephone, or communications services. The bill provides an effective date of October 1, 2025.

Committee Assignments:

SB __:

HB 857: Filed, not referenced

ACTION RECOMMENDED: SUPPORT

Utility Relocation

(SB 818/HB 703)

Sponsors: Sen. McClain/Rep. Robinson (W.)

Summary:

The bill requires all utilities to submit a relocation schedule within 30 days and begin relocation work within 60 days of notification of utility facilities interfering with the use, maintenance, or expansion of a publicly owned right of way. Government entities must, under certain circumstances, reimburse relocation costs for broadband facilities. The bill provides an effective date of July 1, 2025.

Committee Assignments:

SB 818: Filed, not referenced

HB 703: Filed, not referenced

ACTION RECOMMENDED: NEUTRAL

State Renewable Energy Goals

(SB __/HB 621)

Sponsors: Sen. __/Rep. Eskamani

Summary:

The bill modifies the definition of "renewable energy" to exclude energy produced using high quality synthetic gas produced from waste petroleum coke with carbon capture and sequestration. In addition, the bill would prohibit the drilling or exploration of, or production or transportation of, oil, gas, or other petroleum products on the land and waters of the state. The Office of Energy would be directed to develop a unified statewide plan to have 100% of the state's energy generated from renewable resources by 2050 and by 2051 will have net zero carbon emissions statewide. The bill would create the Renewable Energy Workforce Development Advisory Committee consisting of 13 members appointed by the Commissioner of Agriculture. The committee would make recommendations to promote employment growth and access to jobs in the energy efficiency and renewable energy industry. A report of the committee's findings would be presented to the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House by January 1, 2026, and each January 1 thereafter. The bill provides an effective date of July 1, 2025.

Committee Assignments:

SB __:

HB 621: Filed, not referenced

ACTION RECOMMENDED: NEUTRAL (The bill is not expected to move. If the bill gains traction, staff will recommend opposing it.)**Rural Communities**

(SB 110/HB __)

Sponsors: Sen. Simon/Rep. __**Summary:**

The bill requires the state land planning agency to prioritize technical assistance funding for government in rural areas and mandates consultation with the newly created Office of Rural Prosperity, within the Department of Commerce, to assist local governments in navigating procurement of state and federal resources. It revises sales and use tax revenue distributions to include fiscally constrained counties in support of public safety and infrastructure. The bill modifies definitions for fiscally constrained counties to account for population growth and increasing property values. It seeks to increase infrastructure funding directed to rural road projects along with economic development initiatives through grants for business growth, site preparedness, and technology adoption. It further requires the Office of Broadband to consult with each rural community liaison within the Office of Rural Prosperity to report annually on implementation of broadband activities in rural, unserved, or underserved areas of the state. The bill provides an effective date of July 1, 2025.

Committee Assignments:

SB 110: Community Affairs; Fiscal Policy

HB __:

ACTION RECOMMENDED: NEUTRAL**PRIORITY****Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services**

(SB 700/HB 651)

Sponsors: Sen. Truenow/Rep. Tuck**Summary:**

The bill provides if a proposed power plant site is located on land classified as agricultural in the last 5 years, the electric utility must submit the Ten-Year Site Plan, currently sent to the PSC, to the county commission of the county in which the proposed site is located. It requires the county commission to follow the same process and procedure as the PSC, evaluating the plan and deciding whether the plan is suitable or unsuitable. The county must then provide the PSC with its findings; It states land owned or leased by an electric utility which may also contain a solar energy system and is used for any other agriculture use must be classified by the property appraiser as agricultural; It requires an electric utility to offer first right of refusal of the development rights (via a less than fee simple acquisition) to the State of Florida for any land acquired, offered for sale, or transferred by the utility, which was classified as agricultural lands within five years before the date of acquisition; It broadens the Department of Agriculture's authority to regulate electric vehicle charging stations, expanding the definition of a charging

station and giving broader enforcement powers to the Department. The bill provides an effective date of July 1, 2025.

Committee Assignments:

SB 700: Filed, not referenced

HB 651: Filed, not referenced

ACTION RECOMMENDED: NEUTRAL (Staff has expressed initial concerns with the bill sponsors.)

Department of Transportation/Transportation

(SB 462/HB 567)

Sponsors: Sen. DiCeglie/Rep. McFarland

Summary:

The bill updates utility installation standards, including making facilities electronically detectable and compensation for damages or delays caused by utility owners, including electric co-ops. The bill provides an effective date of July 1, 2025.

Committee Assignments:

SB 462: Transportation; Regulated Industries; Fiscal Policy

HB 567: Economic Infrastructure; Transportation & Economic Development Budget

Subcommittee; Commerce

ACTION RECOMMENDED: OPPOSE

MONITOR

Public Service Commission

(SB 354/HB __)

Sponsors: Sen. Gaetz/Rep. __

Summary:

The bill increases the number of PSC commissioners from five to seven, of which one shall be a certified public accountant and one be a chartered financial analyst. It directs the PSC to establish a schedule for public utilities to submit rate change requests. The bill mandates the PSC keep utility returns on equity close to the risk-free rate with deviations requiring justification and revises annual reporting requirements to include economic analyses related to rate changes, cost impacts of excess returns on equity, long term impacts of regulated returns on equity, executive compensation and utility benchmarking. The bill provides an effective date of July 1, 2025.

Committee Assignments:

SB 354: Regulated Industries; Appropriations Committee on Agriculture, Environment & General Government; Fiscal Policy

HB __:

ACTION RECOMMENDED: NEUTRAL

TRACKING

Residential Utility Disconnections

(SB 330/HB 419)

Sponsors: Sen. Berman/Rep. Tendrich

Summary:

The bill prohibits utility disconnections when forecasted heat indices reach 90 degrees or above, temperatures drop to 32 degrees or below, or during a state of emergency. It requires waiving of reconnection and late fees or disconnecting services on weekends, state holidays, and days preceding holidays. It prevents utilities from passing compliance costs to customers and disallows service disconnections for accounts less than 60 days overdue. It requires utilities to offer payment assistance information and inform customers of disconnection suspensions through public alerts in multiple languages based on the primary languages spoken in a particular service area.

The bill provides an effective date of July 1, 2025.

Committee Assignments:

SB 330: Regulated Industries; Appropriations Committee on Agriculture, Environment & General Government; Fiscal Policy

HB 419: Economic Infrastructure; Civil Justice & Claims; Commerce

ACTION RECOMMENDED: NEUTRAL (The bill is not expected to move. If the bill gains traction, staff will recommend opposing it.)

Heat Illness Prevention

(SB 510/HB 35)

Sponsors: Sen. Rouson/Rep. Gottlieb

Summary:

The bill requires implementation of an outdoor heat exposure safety program by employers in sectors where work is primarily outdoors and greater than 15-minute intervals. It provides for training in heat illness prevention along with response to heat related symptoms and establishes provisions for access to drinking water and shade. It provides an effective date of October 1, 2025.

Committee Assignments:

SB 510: Commerce & Tourism; Appropriations Committee on Agriculture, Environment & General Government; Fiscal Policy

HB 35: Industries & Professional Activities; Human Services; Commerce

ACTION RECOMMENDED: NEUTRAL (The bill is not expected to move. If the bill gains traction, staff will recommend opposing it.)