

ASSOCIATED INDUSTRIES OF FLORIDA
**LEGISLATIVE
DAILY BRIEF**



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AIF and the business community were once again successful in discouraging the consideration of SB 1558 – the so called “Fabre Fix” during today’s meeting of the Senate Judiciary Committee. Once again, Senator Jeremy Ring (D-Margate) did not have the votes to get his bill passed.

The business community did suffer a momentary set-back at the same committee meeting with the passage of SB 2356, the “Guns in the Workplace” bill by Senator Durell Peaden (R-Crestview). You will find a complete report on what took place with this bill in tonight’s report.

Several workforce development bills were also heard this afternoon. AIF is very pleased with the progress of several bills this session that strengthen the relationship between the private sector and the state’s educational system. Only by working together will Florida’s workforce be prepared to meet the challenges of the global economy.

Both the Senate and House will be in session Wednesday to take up their respective versions of the 2007 budget.

Guns in the Workplace

SB 2356 Relating to Individual Personal Property Rights by Senator Durell Peaden (R-Crestview) was heard by the Senate Judiciary Committee this morning. More commonly, though, this bill relates to guns in the workplace. Throughout the bill it refers to personal property that an individual lawfully possesses and has a right to possess. However, the heart of the matter really is about guns or firearms.

SB 2356 prohibits a property owner – whether a public or private entity – from barring customers or employees from its premises if those people are in legal possession of a firearm that is locked inside or locked to their vehicle. The bill also prohibits searches or investigations of vehicles for firearms by business owners. It would also prohibit an employer from adopting or maintaining any employment policies that would prohibit possession of such items within the employees’ cars.

AIF was not given the opportunity to speak at this committee hearing today. However, we have previously voiced our opposition to this legislation and will continue to oppose it at future committee stops in both the House and Senate. This bill will undermine the doctrine of

employment at will and takes away an employer's ability to freely set his or her own policies relating to firearms or other dangerous items in the workplace. Although the bill carves out a few exempt locations such as schools or national defense facilities, it leaves many businesses who serve vulnerable customers at risk – such as nursing homes or day care facilities.

There are also concerns about safety and property rights involved in this legislation. If this bill eventually passes, the Legislature would be determining that an individual's right to bear arms is more important in this state than one's private property rights.

There were no amendments considered or adopted onto the bill. However, public testimony lasted almost an hour, which included some significant questioning of the speakers, particularly by Senator Ted Deutch (D-Delray Beach) and Committee Chairman Alex Villalobos (R-Miami).

The bill passed the committee by a vote of 8-3. Senators Ted Deutch, Arthenia Joyner (D-Tampa) and Steve Geller (D-Hallandale Beach) opposed the bill. Please contact these senators and thank them for opposing this legislation that would undermine employer's rights to govern their property and employees as they lawfully see fit.

SB 2356 has cleared its last committee of reference and is now headed to the Senate floor for further consideration. Its House companion, HB 1417 by Representative Dennis Baxley (R-Ocala), has not been heard in any committee as of today.

AIF opposes legislation that prohibits businesses from enforcing or maintaining policies that ban guns in the workplace. Employers should be allowed to establish these types of policies and exert their rights as property owners. Maintain a safe work environment is paramount for the longevity of any employer in Florida.

Workforce Development

The Senate Committee on Education Pre K - 12 considered two workforce development bills supported by AIF. One of which was SB 2458 Relating to the High School to Business Career Enhancement Act by Senator Victor Crist (R-Tampa). The program would do a number of things for students hoping to get on-the-job career training as well as for businesses that may benefit from a better prepared and more skilled workforce. The act would require each district school board to adopt policies and provide internships for high school students through businesses that partner within the school district. The internships, which would be provided based on the career goals of each participating student, would include an evaluation component based on criteria established by the school district. Participating businesses are eligible for a tax credit equal to 50 percent of the total wages paid to the student during the internship (if the business pays the student minimum wage with an average of up to 20 hours a week). Participating businesses may claim credits for up to four internships per year.

SB 2458 was passed unanimously and will now be considered by the Senate Finance & Tax Committee.

AIF supports legislation that encourages schools boards to establish partnerships with the private sector aimed at making easier for our students to gain valuable on-the-job experience. Better-prepared students equal a better trained workforce; one that will be able to meet the demands of the global economy.

The Committee also approved SB 2598 Relating to the Governor's School for Science and Technology by Senator Steve Wise (R-Jacksonville). Florida currently does not operate a residential program for secondary a student that emphasizes the areas of accelerated math, science, and technology. SB 2598 creates the Governor's School, a residential program that focuses on those areas for qualifying students in grades 9- 12. The school would also provide summer training programs for teachers. The program would be located in Brevard County, and would be operated by the Florida Virtual School (FLVS), which was founded in 1997 as the nation's first state-wide Internet- based public high school.

The FLVS would appoint a school director and adopt rules to specify requirements for admission, standards for selection of students, and the number of students to be enrolled. Students would apply and be selected for enrollment based on test scores or favorable recommendations from teachers or school staff. The bill appropriates \$1 million from the General Revenue Fund as start-up costs for the Governor's School opening in the 2009- 2010 academic year.

Unfortunately, the bill was not heard by the Committee due to time constraints but will be considered at the next meeting.

AIF supports innovative programs in education that help prepare students compete in a global economy by focusing on core subjects like reading, writing, and math. Florida must no longer compare its students with those in other states; instead we must compare our students with those in other countries if our goal is to compete in the global economy.

Health Care

The Senate Health Policy Committee unanimously approved SB 110 Relating to Health Insurance/Prostate Cancer by Senator Tony Hill (D-Jacksonville). The bill mandates that health insurance policies, group health insurance policies, & health maintenance contracts provide coverage for annual screening for prostate cancer for men forty years or older.

Currently, insurance coverage issued in the state of Florida covers testing done as medically necessary preventative services for the screening of prostate cancer. However, there is a discrepancy as to what ages should be covered in such testing. Most testing covered by insurance plans limits them to age fifty and over. The current plans do not include younger men who are of a higher risk of contracting prostate cancer.

SB 110 will now be heard by the Senate General Government Appropriations Committee.

AIF consistently opposes additional mandated coverages because the resultant cost increases could force some insurers out of the market and price health care insurance out of the reach of many employers and businesses.

Please send your comments or suggestions to us at aif@aif.com or call the Governmental Affairs department at (850)224-7173.

- For more information on all of the important legislative information concerning the business community, go to our “members only” Florida Business Network web site at <http://fbnnet.com>
- Send us your E-mail address and we will begin to send this report to you automatically via E-mail.