

**Legislative Update
by Anna Small,
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Last week was committee week in Tallahassee. Legislators did not hear many bills, but are gearing up for another round of budget cuts. The House is also adjusting to a new committee structure since the Speaker made some significant changes over the summer. The Committees met during the week and heard a number of presentations regarding the implementation of last year's bills. The governmental agencies were all invited to present proposed budget cuts for the legislature's consideration.

House Health Regulation Policy Committee heard presentations from the Agency for Health Care Administration regarding the implementation of SB 1986. That bill was aimed primarily at preventing fraud in the home health industry, but contains provisions which limit who may be licensed as a health care provider. If an applicant has a history of certain felony charges, it disqualifies them from obtaining a license issued by the Department of Health. The Florida Nurses Association has spearheaded a coalition which includes other healthcare provider associations and employers of healthcare providers. This coalition is working to make legislators aware of the unintended consequences of this bill and we are striving to work with last year's sponsors to find an amendment which would be amenable to all.

The Department of Health included in its proposed budget cuts the elimination of the Nursing Student Loan Forgiveness Program. This is a program for nurses who work in specified medically underserved areas. Each nurse receives an annual amount, up to \$4000, which is paid directly to lending agencies. This year, the 600 nurses in the program only received \$2000 due to a lack of revenue. There were also no new nurses accepted into the program due to the shortage of funds. Each of us pays for this program when we pay a \$5 fee when we renew our licenses. The program is aimed at encouraging nurses to work in areas which have difficulty recruiting nurses. Your lobbying team has expressed concern regarding the proposed elimination of this program to the Governor's office and to legislators. We will continue to monitor this program and to advocate for its continuance.

We also met with Representative Denise Grimsley to discuss items which could be included in a HB 1209 "glitch" bill. As you will recall, HB 1209 changed the way in which the Board of Nursing regulates educational programs. Representative Grimsley plans to file a bill which will fix some of the unintended consequences of HB 1209, clarify some issues, and require accreditation by NLN-AC or CCNE for all RN level educational programs. At this point Representative Grimsley is gathering information on what needs to be included in the bill.

We have seen two of our bills filed in the Senate. SB 188 by Mike Bennett is our controlled substance prescribing bill and SB 114 by Dave Aronberg is our safe staffing bill. We expect the House versions to be filed soon and we appreciate all the support of our sponsors. We urge you to email Representative Nick Thompson, Chair of House Health Regulation Policy Committee and encourage him to agenda the controlled substance prescribing bill in his committee. Tell him why this is such an important issue to you: nick.thompson@myfloridahouse.gov

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