



## 2020 LEGISLATIVE FINAL REPORT

UPDATED ON MARCH 19, 2020

### 2020 Legislative Victories: Affordable Housing, Environment & More

A look at how Florida Realtors helped shape legislation to benefit the state's real estate industry during the 2020 Legislative Session.

For the first time in more than a decade, the state's housing trust funds have been fully funded at \$370 million, giving Floridians additional resources they can use to achieve the dream of homeownership. This has the ability to provide millions of dollars in downpayment assistance in 2021 as the state recovers from the impact of COVID-19.

In addition to fully funding the housing trust funds, the Florida Legislature passed other Florida Realtors priorities including record amounts of environmental funding, comprehensive affordable housing policy changes, eliminating discriminatory housing restrictions and providing clear guidelines for emotional support animal (ESA) certificates. Bills passed head to the governor for final approval.

"Working with the Legislature to fully fund the state's housing trust funds is a session-defining victory, especially considering the difficult economic circumstances," says Barry Grooms, 2020 president of Florida Realtors and co-owner of Sarabay Suncoast Realty Inc. in Bradenton. "Adding this victory to the second year of strong environmental funding, affordable housing policy changes, elimination of discriminatory housing restrictions, and solutions to the growing abuse prevalent with ESA certificates make this legislative session extremely special for Realtors and their customers."

Grooms adds, "My sincerest thanks to the Florida Legislature for working so vigilantly during these unprecedented times to pass a budget that helps our economy while also setting aside significant resources to deal with the evolving viral threat."

#### Florida Realtors biggest legislative victories

- **Full funding of the housing trust funds (\$370 million)** — For the first time since 2006, lawmakers appropriated all funds available in the State and Local Government Housing Trust Funds for affordable housing programs. The full appropriation of \$370 million includes \$225 million for SHIP, which will result in an incredible increase in downpayment assistance, \$115 million for SAIL and \$30 million to assist Panhandle residents whose properties were devastated by Hurricane Michael.
- **Increased flexibility for affordable housing projects** — The Legislature approved a measure that gives local governments increased flexibility regarding where they can build affordable housing developments.
- **Curbing emotional support animal certificate abuse** — The Legislature passed a bill that will require a patient who needs an ESA certificate to see a licensed medical practitioner with whom they have an established professional relationship. The target of this new law is to reduce the abuse seen with online transactions to obtain these certificates.
- **Removal of blatant fair housing violations from documents** — A bill was passed that removes discriminatory language from title transactions such as deeds, and expressly states the restrictions are unlawful, unenforceable and null and void. It also provides for summary removal of discriminatory restrictions from the governing documents of a property owners' association.
- **\$625 million for environmental projects** — The Legislature continues to allocate record levels of funding for projects that help address Florida's environmental issues. This year's funding of more than \$625 million includes money for Everglades restoration, springs protection, red tide research and a monumental amount of funding for wastewater facility treatment upgrades.
- **Another big step for water quality in Florida** — The Legislature passed a comprehensive water quality bill that sets the blueprint for septic tank mitigation and replacement where available. It also addresses new reporting requirements for the agriculture industry and wastewater facilities.
- **Making commercial leases easier** — The Legislature passed a measure that eliminates the outdated requirement in Florida law that requires two people to witness the signing of leases longer than a year.
- **Extending property tax benefits** — The Legislature passed a joint resolution for the November 2020 ballot that extends the portability of a homestead property tax benefit from two years to three years.
- **Preventing unlicensed real estate activity** — The Legislature allocated up to \$500,000 to combat unlicensed real estate activity.

The Legislature also passed a multitude of other bills of interest to Realtors. They include things such as fines for excessive wastewater dumping, additional remedies for nuisance properties, increased condo insurance coverage and protecting private property rights as communities manage their growth.

Additionally, many bills of interest made it far into the legislative process and will likely come back again next session for consideration. These bills include short-term rental regulation, further cuts to the Business Rent Tax, transfer fees charged by community associations, swimming pool safety and more. Florida Realtors will continue to work on these issues next year.

© 2020 Florida Realtors® REALTOR® and Realtor® are registered trademarks of the National Association of Realtors®

Back to old site (<https://archive.floridarealtors.org/index.cfm>)