



We the People

2024 Legislative Issues & Priorities

**A Resource Guide
for the Duval
Legislative Delegation**

This document was developed by ***We the People***, a coalition of diverse community groups, organizations and advocates, with a goal of presenting a unified legislative agenda for addressing the unmet needs of Duval County residents.

Members came together to discuss issues and identify priorities for legislative action. By consensus, five issue areas were selected as the focus of this effort:

- Healthcare Access and Affordability, including Disability Care, Mental Healthcare, Reproductive Healthcare, and Workforce Demands,
- Affordable Housing, including Tenants' Rights,
- Democracy & Voting Rights, including Rights for Returning Citizens,
- Education, including the Rights of LGBTQIA+ and Black Students & Staff, and,
- Gun Violence Prevention.

This document provides information and links to supporting data and resources about the impact of these issues on Jacksonville and communities across the state. It also presents solutions for consideration by state lawmakers to address them. We hope this document will be a resource for legislators, as well as advocates working to improve the lives of Duval County residents.

We welcome your questions, comments, and suggestions.

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We the People

Northside Coalition of Jacksonville • Beaches Activists Movement (BAM) • Public School Defenders • Democratic Women's Information Network (DWIN) • Florida Rising • Jacksonville NOW • Moms Demand Action • MAD DADS • Florida Voices for Health • Harriett Tubman Freedom Fighters • Indivisible Mandarin • Florida For All • Families for Strong Public Schools • Equality Florida • Sponsored by Grace • Jax Tenants Union • State Voices Florida

Table of Contents

Issue 1: Healthcare Access & Affordability	3
Issue 2: Affordable Housing	8
Issue 3: Democracy & Voting Rights	11
Issue 4: Education	14
Issue 5: Gun Violence Prevention	19
References	23

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ISSUE 1

HEALTHCARE ACCESS AND AFFORDABILITY

*Including Disability Care, Mental Healthcare, Reproductive Healthcare
and Workforce Demands*

Our Concerns

- 1.1 Over half a million Florida residents are caught in the [insurance “gap”](#) (not qualified for Medicaid but unable to afford Marketplace insurance).
- 1.2 Over **2.6 Million Floridians** are [uninsured](#) (20% of ALL uninsured Americans live in the state of Florida).
- 1.3 Florida has recently had 8 rural [hospital closures](#), many in North Florida.
- 1.4 A March, 2023 survey shows [¾ of Americans support Medicaid expansion](#); most view it as health insurance NOT as a welfare program.
- 1.5 Over 22,000 disabled Floridians remain on [waiting lists for years](#) awaiting healthcare coverage, many of them children.
- 1.6 Children with disabilities are currently [living unlawfully in nursing homes](#) due to lack of coverage/care/healthcare workforce.
- 1.7 Florida ranks 49/50 in spending per capita on [disability health services](#) and in [mental health spending](#).

- 1.8 North Carolina just voted to expand Medicaid, making [Florida one of only 10 states](#) who have not expanded Medicaid.
- 1.9 Expanding Medicaid is estimated to save us [\\$200 Million dollars](#). We are leaving federal dollars on the table, since the Federal Government covers 90% of the cost of Medicaid expansion and most of us pay Federal taxes which are only helping low-income people in other states.
- 1.10 We have unacceptably high preterm birth rates, especially in [Duval County where 1 in 8 babies is born prematurely](#).
- 1.11 Childbirth is [14 times more lethal](#) than a legal abortion; according American Psychological Association data, [abortion does NOT harm mental health](#) but limiting or denying access to abortion DOES.
- 1.12 The 6-week abortion ban will only worsen maternal mortality rates, as people are forced to continue their pregnancies regardless of their health. Studies show [34% higher death rates for pregnant people in states with strict bans](#) vs abortion access states.
- 1.13 A 6-week abortion ban will worsen an already severe shortage of OB/GYN doctors, as states with [strict bans saw almost 11% drop in OB/GYN residency applicants](#) in just one year.
- 1.14 Strict abortion bans are a political LOSER. In 7 of 7 states where abortion rights were on the ballot since Roe was overturned, [abortion rights WON](#).
- 1.15 Medicaid recipients are being unenrolled at an alarming rate: over [740,000 Floridians](#) have been disenrolled as of October 19, 2023 with [over half of them under age 20](#). Callers are experiencing major delays, sometimes up to 2 hours on the phone.
- 1.16 **The alarmingly high rates** of maternal mortality among Black women in Florida. According to the Florida Department of Health in 2020, non-

Hispanic Black women were almost four times as likely to have a pregnancy related death compared to non-Hispanic white women. The Florida Hospital Association issued a [call to action](#) in May to address FL's high Maternal Mortality rates; their requests are reasonable; they should be heeded and followed immediately.

- 1.17 A 2020 study showed a [16% INCREASE in infant mortality](#) in states with limited abortion access, and further that abortion restrictions had an even [larger impact on mortality](#) rates than poverty.
- 1.18 Providing healthcare to human beings, including children with disabilities, the working poor and caregivers, should NOT be considered a welfare handout. Most people see it that way.

Legislative Solutions

- 1.1 Request that the House Select Committee on Health Innovation and the Senate Health & Human Services Appropriations Committee hold committee meetings during the 2024 Legislative Session to explore the feasibility of Medicaid Expansion as it relates to access and affordability of healthcare.
- 1.2 Stop unenrolling Medicaid recipients and reevaluate the redetermination process.
- 1.3 Eliminate or significantly decrease the Developmental Disability waitlists by creating a plan that prioritizes families based on disability needs, length of time on the wait list, family caretaker availability, etc.
- 1.4 Respond to lack of healthcare for children and adults with disabilities by increasing funding and expanding our healthcare workforce.

- 1.5 Increase funding to Florida's HBCU's and other state colleges to provide scholarships to Black students who are interested in medicine, nursing and other health professions, including the training of Black doulas.
- 1.6 Address home healthcare worker shortage and allow institutionalized children to return home by increasing wages for private duty nurses and other caregivers.
- 1.7 For real solutions, bring in all stakeholders including Healthy Start, Department of Health, Florida Hospital Association, safety net hospitals, doctors, nurses, caregivers, patients, and their families.
- 1.8 Stop criminalizing healthcare providers, whether to pregnant people, people with gender dysphoria or other medical issues.
- 1.9 Request funding to expand prenatal and postpartum health benefits for Duval County residents.
- 1.10 Request increased funding for the Florida Department of Health in Duval County to include addressing our [high infant mortality](#), maternal mortality and drug overdose death rates.
- 1.11 Supporting reproductive rights and Healthcare provider autonomy will help address our healthcare provider shortage.
- 1.12 Rescind the [6 week abortion](#) ban in order to actually save the lives of infants and mothers.
- 1.13 Rescind the [\\$25 Million funding of Fake Clinics](#). Use that funding to increase mental health resources and support our Departments of Health.

Of Note

- **Florida Republicans** are starting to realize that healthcare is not only the right thing and the cheaper thing to do but will also help them win elections. Representative Joel Rudman has spoken out about this recently.
- **Republican leadership** in both the House and Senate, along with the FHA, also recognize these problems and have called for solutions.
- **Florida House Speaker Paul Renner** created a Select Committee on Healthcare Innovation, whose goal is to review issues relating to access and affordability in health care.
- **Florida Senate President Kathleen Passidomo** wants to take steps during the 2024 session to attract more healthcare providers.

ISSUE 2

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Including Tenants' Rights

Our Concerns

- 2.1 Rent in the state of [Florida increased 36% from 2020 to 2022](#) (compared to [15% nationally](#)).
- 2.2 Florida is one of the most landlord-friendly states in America. Landlords can evict tenants after giving them a [3-day notice for nonpayment of rent](#), and they can terminate leases after giving tenants 15 days' notice.
- 2.3 Florida has the second-highest [eviction rate](#) in the nation.
- 2.4 In Florida, an eviction can be completed in [two to three weeks](#). However, it can take longer if the reason for the eviction is contested by the tenant. The state also preempts local rent control ordinances. This promotes out-of-state corporations to buy up a lot of rental properties.
- 2.5 Rising rental rates are compounding problems for an increasing number of unhoused members of Duval County and pricing people out of a previously affordable housing market.
- 2.6 Definition of “affordable” vs “low-income” housing; we don’t have enough low-income housing and current rent rates are unattainable by most people.

- 2.7 Jax (and Florida) has a very [high percentage of corporate-owned properties](#), because our policies have made it easy and very profitable. Changing policies to favor citizen homeownership would work to reverse these troubling trends.
- 2.8 Florida’s high rate of out-of-state landlords are price-gouging, yet legislatures just [stripped away home rule](#) which helped prevent extreme rental rate increases.
- 2.9 [147,000 people in Jacksonville are on the wait-list](#) for low-income housing (title 8 housing).
- 2.10 “The question is not the total supply of housing but rather who owns and controls the housing stock, for what purpose, and its affordability.” From [UNF’s JRHP Report](#) .
- 2.11 We "recommend a proactive policy and administrative mechanism to monitor and regulate the role of large institutional investor activity in the ownership and control of single-family homes in Jacksonville” From [UNF’s JRHP Report](#).

Legislative Solutions

- 2.1 Take **decisive** action to protect renters from predatory fees, exorbitant security deposits and discrimination based on their identity or source of income.
- 2.2 Tenants need **predictable housing costs** and relief from exorbitant fees by requiring plain language disclosure of monthly fees and spreading high security deposit costs over several months.
- 2.3 Propose legislation to **hold landlords accountable** for the condition of the rental property. Tenants should be able to make repairs and charge the cost to a landlord when the landlord does not maintain the property.

- 2.4 Require all properties to **disclose both management and owners**. It's way too easy to hide behind an LLC and neglect the property and the tenants.
- 2.5 Propose legislation requiring a **central directory of landlords** with information, complaint history, etc. so tenants can research their landlords.
- 2.6 In addition to the **Office of Tenant Advocacy**, pass legislation to cap security deposits at one month's rent, stop application fee abuse from landlords, ban discrimination against tenants based on their source of income, and regulate and prohibit price gouging of vulnerable renters by predatory companies.
- 2.7 Create or support legislation that provides a **90 day stay of eviction for pregnant women and their children** to mitigate the stress related to acquiring and moving to a new apartment or home.
- 2.8 We "recommend a proactive policy and administrative mechanism to [monitor and regulate the role of large institutional investor](#) activity in the ownership and control of single-family homes in Jacksonville".
- 2.9 It's not hard to understand: the free market is not working; housing is NOT A LUXURY, it's a **necessity for human survival**. The state needs to step up and allow home rule or create their own form of regulation of landlords coupled with protections for tenants.

ISSUE 3

DEMOCRACY & VOTING RIGHTS

Including Rights for Returning Citizens

Our Concerns

- 3.1 Gerrymandered districts resulted in the [elimination of 2 majority black districts](#) in the state (this is being [strongly rebuked](#) in the judicial system, though the damage has been done).
- 3.2 In all but nine states, [Returning Citizens \(RC\) who have completed their sentences](#) automatically become eligible to vote; meanwhile Florida has **1.4 Million disenfranchised voters**; estimates are that Duval County has 80,000 RC's who are eligible to vote but fear registering.
- 3.3 In 2022, after being allowed to register by their SOE's, the FL "election police" [arrested some 20 ex-felons](#) in a maneuver [explicitly designed to intimidate and discourage other ex-felons to vote](#).
- 3.4 [SB 90](#), [SB 524](#), [SB 7050](#) have placed unreasonable restrictions on voter access to the ballot, caused massive purging of VBM registration, made it harder for third party voter registration organizations to register eligible voters and resulted in more costs to our SOE's.
- 3.5 24 States and D.C. have [enacted Automatic Voter Registration \(AVR\)](#) with Driver's License registration. This is an easy way to encourage more voting in our state.
- 3.6 In 2020, Florida Power & Light consultants effectively "stole" elections in the Florida Senate via [ghost candidates](#) and a network of [dark money](#). In early 2023, FPL CEO Eric Silagy [abruptly stepped down](#) amid the scandal.

- 3.7 In all but 9 states, [RC's are granted the right to vote](#) after their prison, parole or probation is complete; FL is one of the few states requiring RC's determine their fines/fees status and pay it.

Legislative Solutions

- 3.1 Rescind all portions of SB90, SB524 and SB7050 that disenfranchise voters.
- 3.2 Support a Florida Voting Rights Bill that makes it easier to register voters and includes:
- Same-Day Voter Registration
 - Automatic Voter Registration
 - Permanent Vote-by- Mail requests
 - Provisional ballots that are counted anywhere in the county.
 - Elect the Secretary of State [vs. the position being appointed by the Governor]
 - Eliminate the Office of Election Crimes & Security
- 3.3 Restore voting rights to Returning Citizens as intended by (and voted overwhelmingly for) Amendment 4. It is blatantly discriminatory and unconstitutional to require RC's to research fines and pay restitution beyond their criminal penalty.
- 3.4 At the very least, introduce legislation to fund a state team of lawyers, clerks and volunteers to make a good faith effort to assess whether or not all fines and fees have been paid; if no outstanding fees are found, immediately reinstate the freedom to vote to returning citizens.
- 3.5 Introduce legislation for automatic voter registration (AVR) with Driver's License registration and same-day VR to encourage more voter participation. Nearly half of our states already have this.

- 3.6 Instead of intimidating ex-felons and dropping out of the ERIC system, support legislation such as that introduced by [Senator Castor to prevent power companies from manipulating elections](#), an example of ACTUAL election fraud.
- 3.7 Fund our county SOE with grants or otherwise so that we can communicate changes to our electorate and pay for much needed upgrades such as voting machines.

ISSUE 4 EDUCATION

Including the Rights of LGBTQIA+ and Black Students & Staff

Our Concerns

- 4.1 [HB1557 and HB7](#) target students and teachers in the LGBTQIA+ community as well as those trying to support them.
- 4.2 [HB1](#) is literally using taxpayer's dollars to fund billionaire's children to go to private, charter, or even homeschooling, at the expense of our public schools.
- 4.3 FL has the [highest number of Book Bans](#) of any state--over 1400 books, or 40% of our nation's total. These bans are a result of legislation such as HB1069 which requires immediate removal of books upon 1 objection.
- 4.4 We now have the [largest teacher shortage](#) in Florida's history, created by HB1, HB1557, HB7, and book bans, [among other things](#). The ability to transfer constantly between a variety of school systems may make it difficult for districts to adequately staff for students.
- 4.5 The last several years have seen [unprecedented politicization](#) of [School Board races](#) to the detriment of our students.
- 4.6 Bullying the [College Board](#) to water down AP African American Studies (and attempts to do the same for AP Psychology) have put FL students at a disadvantage.

- 4.7 Adding alternative testing mechanisms, such as Classical Learning Test, and/or funding for creating AP alternatives that may not be widely accepted by accredited institutions.
- 4.8 [Defunding Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion programs](#) and the elimination of safe spaces result in harm not only to our LGBTQ and BIPOC students but also students with disabilities and our military families.
- 4.9 We risk losing the status of our previously highly rated universities and colleges.

Legislative Solutions

- 4.1 Rescind HB1557, HB7, HB1 and fully fund our public schools as required by the Florida constitution.
- 4.2 Introduce legislation that respects teachers and their training and pays them higher wages (currently FL is 47/50 in teacher pay).
- 4.3 In order for Florida to have a thriving economy and robust workforce pipeline, we must have high-quality public education.
- 4.4 Stop trying to accommodate the minority of extremists whose mission is to ban books, divide our communities and further their agenda of intolerance and hate.
- 4.5 Reestablish DEI programs and safe spaces in all public schools PK-20.
- 4.6 Fund a retrospective study and mandate yearly public reporting by all district-run and charter schools, comparing total tax revenue and capital expenditures by allowable categories.

- 4.7 Reintroduce legislation that protects our most vulnerable populations, including safe spaces and expanded opportunities for counseling and mental health care.
- 4.8 Introduce protections from discrimination, bullying and harassment, especially at school and in the workplace.
- 4.9 Reinstate DEI programs and support groups for our university students.
- 4.10 Strongly condemn anti-LGBTQIA+ hate speech wherever it appears--when we allow the speech to go unchecked, we permit hate, divisiveness, and violence.
- 4.11 Rescind 2022 HB433 to disallow loans between charter schools, within or outside of a district.
- 4.12 Preserve local district sponsor authority to require charter school reporting to the district that meets the need for public accountability and oversight for all tax revenue, expenditures, and contract compliance (Replace f.s. 1002.33 (5)(b) j).
- 4.13 Support local sponsor authority and parity among district-run and charter schools by designating a required order of capital outlay expenditure from tax revenue sources with the last source being school district referendum for sales tax with restricted use (Add to F.S. 1013.32 (4)).
- 4.14 New charter schools MUST always get a zoning change so the community can be notified, and the sponsor MUST authorize.
- 4.15 Rescind legislation changing school start times; this is too expensive and disruptive to communities, families, and industry; stop pre-empting local control.

- 4.16 Traditional Public Schools should be afforded similar statutory flexibility and accountability requirements as Charter schools to increase student achievement across educational settings.
- 4.17 Provide timely and accessible public reporting by County for all schools receiving public tax dollars. Provide transparency and accountability with a “report card” showing total revenue by income source and expenditures by allowable categories with data variables to analyze facility age, enrollment, grade levels, student performance and location.
- 4.18 Step Up for Students, one of our scholarship funding organizations, released their buying guide which allows parents to use taxpayer dollars for recreational purposes like theme [park tickets, kayaks, 55-inch TVs, and much more](#). We would like to see more accountability, especially with the buying guidelines for the Personal Education Program, to ensure tax dollars are used wisely and for educational purposes.
- 4.19 [Vouchers actually increase costs](#), by requiring taxpayers to fund two school systems, one public and one private. Unlike public schools, private schools are permitted to use funding however they choose without disclosing anything about how they use taxpayer funding or how their students perform.
- 4.20 Oppose [HB49](#) reducing workforce regulation. Workforce education should not be used to justify the exploitation of minors. Children should be focused on [school and learning](#); reducing workforce protections for minors may have the unintended consequence of reducing attendance or increasing tardiness which will result in learning loss and poor graduation outcomes.
- 4.21 Oppose 2024 HB109/SB246 which allows public schools to be converted to charter schools by a parental vote. Taxpayers rely on elected and appointed

representatives to make decisions for our system of public schools; removing the authority to a small group of parents who more or may not have the capacity to understand or recognize the needs of the system endangers students, staff, and communities.

- 4.22 Support Florida families with full day VPK programs. Just like clean water, safe food, libraries and good schools, high quality, affordable, and accessible childcare should be a state priority that benefits everyone. We need a variety of affordable childcare choices that employ qualified and caring early educators who can meet children’s diverse needs and set them up for success without breaking the bank.
- 4.23 Early educators are dramatically underpaid, creating turnover and making childcare harder for parents to find. Childcare providers are finding it increasingly difficult to hire or retain passionate staff members who can support themselves on childcare’s extremely low wages—an average of \$13.50 an hour for their complex and valuable work. Most early educators are women, and a disproportionate number are women of color.
- It’s time to ensure childcare jobs are sustainable jobs. They are the jobs that make all other work possible and should be treated as the foundation that they are. That means paying the people who provide care and giving it economic value.
 - Ensuring that the childcare workforce is well-compensated, economically stable, well versed in child development skills, diverse, and culturally competent has positive impacts for children and families too.
 - Higher compensation supports the people, mostly women, who work in childcare to be engaged and present and helps the sector recruit and retain amazing people to do this valuable work.

ISSUE 5

Gun Violence Prevention

Our Concerns

- 5.1 The recent tragedy of 3 innocent people [gunned down in broad daylight for being BLACK](#); this was enabled by all who did not strongly condemn racist hate speech in our community.
- 5.2 Gun violence is now the [#1 cause of death of children](#) in our country.
- 5.3 In Florida, [63% of gun deaths are suicides](#), many of which could be prevented. Having access to a firearm triples one's risk of death by suicide.
- 5.4 Despite [being hugely unpopular](#), a permit less carry law was passed and will result in easier access and less training for gun owners.
- 5.5 Every week there are senseless, preventable unintentional [gun deaths of small children](#).
- 5.6 We need to strengthen our secure storage laws, including for guns stored in vehicles. Only bad outcomes happen when a gun is taken from a vehicle, and the sheriff's office has stated over and over that these guns are going to be used to commit further crimes.
- 5.7 [Gun violence costs Florida \\$40.3 billion each year](#) and has disastrous effects on communities.

- 5.8 Gun homicides and assaults occur at high rates within cities and have a disproportionate impact in historically underfunded neighborhoods.
- 5.9 Guns are the [#1 cause of intimate partner deaths](#) in Jacksonville, according to Hubbard House.
- 5.10 America averages more than 43K gun deaths per year.
- 5.11 [Guns are the leading cause](#) of death for American children & teens.
- 5.12 [Jacksonville leads the state](#) in the number of unintentional deaths and injuries of children due to unsecured firearms.
- 5.13 Gun violence costs Florida taxpayers \$875.9 million each year.
- 5.14 In an average year, 2,989 people die by guns in Florida and 5,267 are wounded by guns.
- 5.15 Black people in Florida are 7 times more likely than white people to die by gun homicide.
- 5.16 Black children and teens in Florida are 3 times more likely than their white peers to die by guns.
- 5.17 Every month, an average of 70 women are shot to death by an intimate partner in the US.
- 5.18 Background checks decrease gun trafficking. In 2021, 28K guns used in crimes were recovered in Florida.
- 5.19 Florida ranks #2 in mass shootings, yet we [refuse federal funding to strengthen life-saving programs](#), such as our “red-flag laws”.

- 5.20 By refusing federal aid, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis left a staggering [\\$15 MILLION in federal funding](#) on the table that could have been used to fight gun violence.

Legislative Solutions

- 5.1 Strengthen our gun storage law, to include guns [left in vehicles](#).
- 5.2 Do not support [legislation that would lower the age](#) to purchase long guns to 18 years. This would dismantle a component of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas Act passed in 2018 after the tragedy at Parkland.
- 5.3 Introduce legislation requiring safety directives and resources about guns as recommended by the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#); namely guns should be unloaded, locked and ammunition should be stored separately.
- 5.4 Support and fund local violence prevention programs like MAD DADS which are addressing gun violence in their own neighborhoods.
- 5.5 [Support](#) and accept funding of [community violence intervention](#) and protection programs which reduce violence by implementing locally driven public-safety measures.
- 5.6 Support [Group Violence Intervention Programs](#): an approach that provides comprehensive social services to support group-involved individuals at high risk for involvement in violence, a unified message from community members that continued violence is unacceptable, and narrowly focused enforcement of individuals who continue to engage in violence.
- 5.7 Do not support legislation (HB17) eliminating waiting period (this would open the Charleston Loophole in FL and allow purchases to proceed after 3 days for long guns/rifles, even if a background check has not been completed. This is how the shooter at the Mother Emanuel AME Church in Charleston obtained his weapon.

5.8 Provide funding to create an Office of Gun Violence Prevention in Florida counties with the highest crime rates, e.g. Duval.

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Housing

[Rent remains high in Central Florida; home sales at lowest point since 2009](#)

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Education

[Florida now leads the country in book bans, new PEN report says. How did that happen?](#)

[Florida teachers are worried new policies could get them fired — or even criminally charged](#)

[College Board Statement on AP Psychology and Florida](#)

[DeSantis defunds diversity programs at Florida public colleges](#)

[Public school advocates: City's allocation to Jacksonville charter school is irresponsible](#)

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Gun Violence Prevention

[Jacksonville leads state in accidental child shooting deaths](#)

[Trends and Disparities in Firearm Deaths Among Children](#)

[Rudman Files Bill Aimed to Restore Three-Day Max Wait to Buy Certain Firearms](#)