



Nonprofit Day in Tallahassee

March 28, 2023

By Marina Pavlov, Florida Association of Nonprofits

Nonprofit leaders need to understand how civic engagement, advocacy and lobbying affect nonprofits including their own. The Independent Sector reports that advocacy effects a return on investment of \$115 to \$1 as a result of connection with the political sector and, in 2021, nonprofit advocacy was responsible for \$26.6 billion in total benefits for communities and taxpayers.

In that spirit, on March 27th the Florida Association of Nonprofits convened a small delegation of nonprofit representatives in Tallahassee for Nonprofit Days. Schmeka Lyons, Carol Von Arx, Roblee Foundation, and I came from Fort Lauderdale and others, including Richard Wittenberg, ACT for Health, joined us from other parts of the state.

On the drive to Tallahassee, Carol Von Arx told us about a statewide nonprofit organization in Missouri much like Florida Nonprofits that had worked on advocacy for many years and had succeeded in building a network of people, organizations and foundations. The organization received funding and support from many sectors including federal, state and local governments and foundations. Von Arx detailed their activities and explained that they are watchdogs monitoring the state budget. They also offer meaningful solutions to social and other problems to state representatives and senators.

Also, during the trip, I explained that our plan was to meet with senators on Day One and representatives on Day Two. The first day included an orientation session to places including the Capitol, the Governor's Mansion and the location of the state offices of officials we planned to approach, including delegates from St Petersburg, North Broward, Miami and Jacksonville.



Senate floor from the gallery

Tuesday, March 28

We met at 9:30 to discuss our plans for the day. Richard Wittenberg presented his white paper about youth and adolescent's health and well-being he had written for a conference last May and shared a one-page summary of it with the group. Schmeka Lyons was there to seek early childhood funds that her organization, a preschool nursery, needed after the pandemic. Florida Nonprofits was seeking recommendations from senators about how nonprofits can more effectively advocate for those who don't have a voice.



Richard Wittenberg,
Schmeka Lyons, and
Senator Darryl Rouson

The delegation then proceeded to the Capitol and the Senate Office Building where we first saw Senator Darryl Rouson, District 16, and introduced ourselves and our issues to him. We also met his legislative aide, St. George Pink, and Steven Paiva, legislative aide for Senator Jay Collins, District 14, St Petersburg, which is Richard Wittenberg's district. We plan to follow up with them.

We went to the Senate and House galleries and then the office of the printer to pick up calendars and a list of senators and house members. We had lunch at Harry's and ended the day at 3 pm, as a large storm was brewing.

Wednesday, March 29

We returned to the Capitol. The first stop was the Senate and we visited the offices of Senator Rosalind Osgood, District 32 and Senator Shevrin Jones, District 34, where we met with his aide, Marina Braynon-Moore, and Joseph Oleksak and Miles Davis, Senator Jones's Senior Legislative Aides.

The Pace Center for Girls was also in the capitol for a meeting of all 22 Pace Centers in the State of Florida. We met with Bart Diebold, the City Manager of Pinellas Park, who is on the board of both Pace Center for Girls and the Children's Services Council in Broward.

We met Representative Bruce Hadley Antone, from district 41 in Orlando, in the elevator and he offered to help nonprofits in any way that he can. We later stopped by his office and said hello to his Legislative Aide, Pamela Newton.

Next, we went to Senate Minority Whip Lauren Book's office, District 35, in Broward County, and met Zoraida Druckman, Chief Legislative Assistant, and Joyce Randall, Senior Administrative Assistant. They offered to have Lauren introduce us on the floor of the Senate.

We then met Jack Levine, from 4Generations Institute, a longtime friend of mine. We hadn't seen each other for 15 years and, after catching up, he invited us to meet Representative Marie Paule Woodson, District 105, Cooper City. We introduced ourselves and the issues we're concerned with. She said she'd work with us when she gets home after session.

We met with Representative Lindsay Cross, District 60 in St. Petersburg.

Finally, we went to the Capitol Plaza to join the celebration of Miami-Dade County Days. There, we met with Senator Ana Maria Rodriguez, District 40, Key Largo, for Monroe and part of Miami-Dade County, former Miami-Dade County Manager Steve Shiver from Homestead, former Miami-Dade County Commissioner Pepe Diaz, and former Representative Eddie Gonzlez, Hialeah.



Senior Administrative Assistant Joyce Randall and Schmeke Lyons in Senate Minority Whip Lauren Book's office



Richard Wittenberg, Representative Lindsay Cross, Marina Pavlov, and Schmeke Lyons

We went to Harry's for lunch, winding up our Nonprofit Days in Tallahassee. We summarized the events and concluded that the time was well spent and that we had met our projected goals. We saw the legislators from our district, announced Nonprofit Days in Tallahassee and received commitments from many legislators and their aides to give greater attention to nonprofits involved in advocacy. We returned to our hotel and agreed to meet again next year in January.

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