



2020

Legislative Priorities for Marion County

For detailed information, please visit:
MarionCountyFL.org/Legislative





Marion County Board of County Commissioners

McPherson Governmental Campus

601 SE 25th Ave.
Ocala, FL 34471
Phone: 352-438-2300
Fax: 352-438-2324

District 1 – David Moore, Vice Chair
District 2 – Kathy Bryant, Commissioner
District 3 – Jeff Gold, Commissioner
District 4 – Carl Zalak III, Commissioner
District 5 – Michelle Stone, Chairman

Sept. 10, 2019

Honorable Senator Perry and members of the delegation,

Marion County is abundantly appreciative of the wonderful working relationship we enjoy with our state legislative delegation. We are thankful for your continued attention to the needs and interests of our residents and businesses. This year, Marion County will continue intentionally improving our veterans' services, natural resource protection and economic vitality. We welcome your partnership in our vision for 2020, which will not only benefit Marion County, but also our neighboring counties, fellow Floridians and tourists. On behalf of the Board of County Commissioners of Marion County, we submit the following for your consideration.

Appropriation Request

Total Maximum Daily Load Initiative

The Florida Springs and Aquifer Protection Act calls for a Basin Management Action Plan (BMAP), which is a comprehensive set of site-specific strategies to reduce or eliminate pollutant loadings and restore particular waterbodies to health. Marion County is requesting legislative support for an appropriation of \$1,000,000 for nutrient-reduction efforts within approved BMAPs through septic and package sewage treatment facility-to-sewer conversions.

Marion County's Priorities

Ninth State Veterans' Nursing Home Site Designation

Marion County's central location provides a unique ability to directly impact more than 650,000 veterans within a service area of less than 75 miles. Nearly 300,000 of these veterans are over the age of 65. We are requesting your continued support with the designation of Marion County as the site for the ninth state veterans' nursing home within the budget for the Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs.

Phase III of the Southeastern Livestock Pavilion's Master Plan

Marion County is requesting support for funding in the amount of \$3,671,768 to complete construction of phase III of the Southeastern Livestock Pavilion master plan project as requested through the Florida Department of Agriculture's budget. The requested funding will allow completion of phase III to include such items as the build out of campsites, a sanitary depository, stormwater infrastructure, entry/exit roadways and additional paved parking areas resulting in enhanced rentals.

Rainbow Lakes Estates Municipal Service District

Marion County is seeking support in amending the Uniform Special District Accountability Act to include a provision for the Rainbow Lakes Estates municipal service district to be categorized as a dependent special district for the purpose of auditing and financial reporting. By amending the act, Rainbow Lakes Estates' audit and financial information would be included in the financial statements of the governing board (county); therefore, eliminating the need for a separate audit.

Dunnellon Airport Authority Dissolution

In May of 2019, the Dunnellon Airport Authority convened and agreed that the airport may be operated more efficiently as a department overseen by the county administrator. Therefore, we are requesting legislative action to dissolve the Dunnellon Airport Authority created by the Uniform Special District Accountability Act.

With the airport as a county department, the Marion County Board of County Commissioners serve as owners and operators, setting the annual budget, identifying and creating necessary policies and streamlining operational powers.

For the upcoming legislative session, Marion County has submitted the following statewide initiatives to Florida Association of Counties for consideration and, likewise, request legislative support for the following:

Statewide Priorities Submitted to Florida Association of Counties

Florida's Historical Resources

It is important to promote historic locations and events with regional significance. We request enhanced support from the legislature in funding projects related to Florida's historical resources including the Florida Division of Historical Resources.

911 Fee Increase

We are requesting support for the Florida 911 Coordinators Association in their efforts to see that the 911 fee be increased. Marion County, for example, funds an astonishing 57% of the cost of its associated 911 services. An increase of the fee would decrease the contribution of those general funds significantly, those savings could be used for housing, roadways, law enforcement, school safety or social services.

Short-term and Vacation Rental Regulations

It's important that short-term lodging establishments operate on a level playing field, providing a consistent and high-quality visitation experience for all guests. Registration, safety and sanitation, and collection of the proper taxes is incumbent upon all who provide lodging for Florida's visitors. Appropriate regulation of hosting platforms will ensure that basic requirements are met, and appropriate taxes are collected and paid.

SHIP Program Funding Restoration

Marion County, like other counties, is in critical need of affordable housing for residents of income levels varying between extremely low up to and including moderate income. The Housing Trust Fund currently receives significantly more funding paid into it on behalf of Marion County, for example, than the county receives back in annual SHIP allocations. To support this critical need, the county requests that the statute be amended and the county receive allocations in the same amount it contributes to the Housing Trust Fund.

Taxation Reform

We are requesting modifications to existing laws to allow for a discretionary sales tax that can be used for general purposes, including operational expenditures, enactment of the transportation sales surtax for non-charter counties and support indexing local option fuel taxes.

Municipal Service Areas

Marion County formally requests legislation modifying Florida Statutes, chapter 180 to allow that where a county has, by ordinance, established one or more utility service areas in the unincorporated area and where the county has the current ability to provide service, a municipality may not provide utility services within such county service area(s) without consent of the county.

Counties and municipalities are encouraged to cooperatively establish utility service boundary agreements that will maximize the capacities and efficiencies of their respective systems, with the goal of providing the most cost-effective utility service to system customers.

Consultants Competitive Negotiation Act

We request your support for increasing the threshold for the construction costs and professional fees under continuing contracts pursuant to the Consultants' Competitive Negotiation Act from the existing thresholds of \$2 million and \$200,000, respectively.

The thresholds for bidding continuing contracts has been in place since 2009. Construction, engineering and project-related costs have significantly increased since that time. Increasing the threshold, at which services for a project go through a separate solicitation, should have a positive impact on overall project cost and reflect the actual increase in the costs of the service to the cost of the entire project.

Florida Recreation Development Assistant Program Funding

Marion County requests the state legislature to fund the fiscal year 2020 Florida Recreation Development Assistant Program grant cycle as an important step in supporting the growing ecotourism sectors at the local level. Local parks and recreation agencies in the state generate nearly \$7.5 billion in economic activity and supports over 60,000 jobs in Florida.

Finally, included in this packet are supporting statements of balanced billing for emergency medical services and the COPCN process within local government. Additionally, we continue to advocate and support several College of Central Florida initiatives.

This packet contains details to further illustrate why we feel these legislative actions are important and are needed to support our veterans, remove tax roadblocks, protect our water resources, promote the state and our region's economic vitality, and aid other local efforts. As always, I remain available to answer any questions you may have about our priorities or positions on any issue.

On behalf of the Marion County Board of County Commissioners, I thank you for the opportunity to present our community's legislative priorities. We look forward to working with you during the next legislative session to address issues critical to our community and state.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Michelle Stone".

Michelle Stone
Chairman

Table of Contents

Appropriation Request

Total Maximum Daily Load Initiative.....	5
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Marion County Priorities

Ninth State Veterans' Nursing Home Site Designation.....	6
Phase III of the Southeastern Livestock Pavilion's Master Plan.....	7
Rainbow Lakes Estates Municipal Service District.....	8
Dunnellon Airport Authority Dissolution.....	9

Statewide Priorities

Florida's Historical Resources.....	10
911 Fee Increase.....	10
Short-term and Vacation Rental Regulations.....	11
SHIP Program Funding Restoration.....	11
Taxation Reform.....	12
Municipal Service Areas.....	12
Consultants Competitive Negotiation Act.....	13
Florida Recreation Development Assistant Program Funding.....	13

Statements of Support

Balance Billing For Emergency Medical Services.....	14
Local Government Regulation of COPCN Service Providers.....	14
The College of Central Florida's Legislative Priorities.....	15

Contact.....	16
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Total Maximum Daily Load Initiative Funding

Requested Action: Provide legislative support for an annual appropriation of \$1,000,000 for nutrient-reduction efforts within approved BMAPs through septic and package sewage treatment facility-to-sewer conversions.



In 2016, the Florida Legislature passed senate bill 552 and the Florida Springs and Aquifer Protection Act (Florida Statutes chapter 373) to protect our water resources in Florida. The policy calls for basin management action plans (BMAPs). These comprehensive sets of site-specific strategies aim to reduce or eliminate pollutant loadings and restore particular water bodies to health.

A specific part of this policy requires septic-to-sewer conversions to help reduce the total maximum daily load into springsheds by reducing nitrogen pollution released into the Upper Floridan Aquifer.

Marion County requests the state legislature to provide an appropriation of \$1,000,000 as match funding within the septic and package facility-to-sewer conversion program at a 50/50 rate; in addition to other funds and in-kind services secured by the county to advance the BMAP initiatives. The types of projects that can be funded would be septic and package facility-to-central sewer conversions and the enhancement of septic tanks within the primary focus area.

Ninth State Veterans' Nursing Home Site Designation

Marion County Priority

Requested Action: Support designation of Marion County as the site for the ninth state veterans' nursing home within the budget for the Florida Department of Veteran's Affairs.



In 2018, state legislature approved \$500,000 in funding to support and assist in planning, engineering and design services for the proposed project. Language authorizing the continuation of the previous year's funding for the planning and design of the ninth state veterans' nursing home in Marion County was approved during the 2019 legislative session. Potential sites for the next state veterans' nursing home are being assessed by the Florida Department of Management Services for recommendation to the Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs.

The ever-growing and aging veteran population within and near the county makes Marion County an ideal site for the next state veterans' nursing home. Marion County's central location provides a unique ability to directly impact more than 650,000 veterans within a service area of less than 75 miles. Marion County and more than 40 local veteran organizations provide award-winning and prompt services to the county's more than 45,000 veterans; that's 1 of every 7 residents. As the third neediest area for a home, Marion County's financial commitment, site conditions and support for this initiative remain unchanged.

Phase III of the Southeastern Livestock Pavilion's Master Plan

Marion County Priority

Requested Action: Support \$3,671,768 in funding to complete construction of phase three of the Southeastern Livestock Pavilion master plan project through the Florida Department of Agriculture's budget.



The amount of \$3,671,768 is requested through the Florida Department of Agriculture's budget in accordance with Florida Statutes, section 288.1175, Agriculture Education and Promotion Facility Request for Funding.

The requested funding will allow completion of phase III to include such items as the build out of campsites, a sanitary dumping station, stormwater infrastructure, entry and exit roadways and additional paved parking areas.

From its opening in May 2017, the covered roping arena has been booked 146 times, generating nearly \$93,000 in revenue, even though many events were free to the agriculture industry. Construction continues on the covered arena's concession and restroom facilities, with completion expected by December 2019.

The facility has also served as shelter for evacuees during the 2018 and 2019 hurricane seasons. The newly constructed covered arena protected horse trailers and RVs while livestock from throughout Florida were kept safe by 226 indoor stalls. Community programs such as 4-H, Forest High School's agricultural program and the Southeastern Youth Fair were among our guests during these evacuations.

Rainbow Lakes Estates Municipal Service District

Marion County Priority

Requested Action: Amend the Uniform Special District Accountability Act (Florida Statutes, chapter 189) to include a provision for the Rainbow Lakes Estates municipal service district (MSD) to be categorized as a dependent special district for the purposes of auditing and financial reporting.



By amending the Uniform Special District Accountability Act (Florida Statutes, chapter 189) to include a provision for the Rainbow Lakes Estates MSD to be categorized as a dependent special district for the purposes of auditing and financial reporting, the Rainbow Lakes Estates MSD's audit and financial information would be included in the financial statements of the governing board (Marion County); therefore, eliminating the need to purchase a separate annual audit.

Dunnellon Airport Authority Dissolution

Marion County Priority

Requested Action: Provide legislative action to dissolve the Dunnellon Airport Authority created by the Uniform Special District Accountability Act and allow the Marion County Board of County Commissioners to serve as owners and operators of the airport as a county department.



The Dunnellon Airport Authority is a political subdivision of the State of Florida created in 1985 pursuant to chapter 81-438, Laws of Florida, and Marion County Code, Article III, section A3. It is a dependent special district that is governed by the Marion County Board of County Commissioners.

In May of 2019, the Dunnellon Airport Authority convened and agreed that the airport may be operated more efficiently as a department overseen by the county administrator. Therefore, we are requesting legislative action to dissolve the Dunnellon Airport Authority created by the Uniform Special District Accountability Act.

With the airport as a county department, the Marion County Board of County Commissioners to serve as owners and operators; setting the annual budget, identifying and creating necessary policies and streamlining operational powers.

Florida's Historical Resources

Requested Action: Enhance support of the Florida Department of State's Division of Historical Resources and their efforts to "inspire a love of history through preservation and education."

Enhanced support of legislature-approved funding of the division's Historic Preservation Grants program will help to continue promoting historical sites, projects of regional significance and Florida's traditional culture.

Extramural initiatives between counties relating to our community and state's history will benefit Florida's tourism efforts. The grant program ensures educational experiences for generations to come through a network of historical sites across Florida, such as Marion County's own Fort King National Historic Landmark.

911 Fee Increase

Requested Action: Support an increase the Florida Department of Revenue's prepaid wireless E911 fee.

Approximately 60% of 911 service needs were met with 911 fees statewide in 2008. Per a 2018 annual report to the governor, the percentage is now 39%. The loss of revenue has resulted in two things: 1) local tax dollars replaced the shortfall; 2) expenditures on emerging technology is limited.

Marion County funds an astonishing 57% of the cost of its 911 services. A 911 fee increase to \$0.80 would decrease the contribution from the county's general fund significantly. These savings could be used for housing, roadways, law enforcement, school safety or social services. Throughout Florida, this same inequitable funding exists whereby property owners carry the burden of funding 911 services.

The Florida 911 Coordinators Association also supports increasing the E911 fee and citing that while consumer technology has advanced since the fee was enacted 25 years ago, very little progress in 911 technology has emerged. Today's technology allowing digital mapping, software-driven answering equipment, and sending images and video via wireless devices was not available.

Short-term and Vacation Rental Regulation

Statewide Priority

Requested Action: Support short-term and vacation rental regulations.

Appropriate regulation of hosting platforms will ensure consistent and high-quality visitation experiences for all guests. These regulations will be used to impose basic requirements such as safety and sanitation and secure the collection of appropriate taxes from operators of short-term and vacation rentals.

There is a place at the table for all of types of lodging. Having many different types of lodging available to visitors makes Florida more open and accessible to all visitors. But we need to update our regulations to ensure that we not provide special treatment to any one type of lodging.

Most importantly, we want to continue to make sure that we are providing a quality visitation experience to all of Florida's guests, no matter where they choose to stay.

SHIP Program Funding Restoration

Statewide Priority

Requested Action: Support the full restoration of State Housing Initiatives Partnership program funding collected through county documentary stamp taxes and paid into the Sadowski housing trust fund by distributing the full amount collected through annual SHIP allocations.

SHIP allocations are made following statutory guidelines in Section 420.9073 and Section 201.15, Florida Statutes. Marion County is in critical need of affordable housing for residents of income levels varying between extremely low up to and including moderate income. The Housing Trust Fund currently receives significantly more funding paid into it on behalf of Marion County than the county receives back in annual SHIP allocations.

Marion County requests at minimum the restoration of full funding for SHIP affordable housing initiatives, which provide the opportunity to preserve affordable housing stock through rehabilitation, assist first-time homebuyers with the purchase of an affordable home as well as other eligible redevelopment/affordable housing efforts.

Taxation Reform

Requested Action: Support modifying existing laws to allow discretionary sales tax funds to be used for general purposes.

Existing laws governing local discretionary sales surtax revenues and fuel tax revenue do not provide the flexibility local governments need to more equitably distribute tax burden amongst its population.

Support modification to existing laws to allow for a discretionary sales tax that can be used for general purposes, including operational expenditures, enactment of the transportation sales surtax for non-charter counties and support indexing local-option fuel taxes.

The flexibility will help Marion County reduce the ad valorem tax levied on property owners burdened with the largest share of taxation under the existing tax structure. The enactment of the transportation sales surtax for non-charter counties will provide a much needed revenue source to fund transportation capital projects especially since the local gas tax is not indexed and it has lost most of its purchasing power due to inflation. Aligning the state and counties with the same indexing system would allow counties to strategically fund projects from revenue generated within their county; allowing for a more targeted control of maintenance, development and investment.

Municipal Service Areas

Requested Action: Support legislation providing cooperatively established utility service boundary agreements between counties and their municipalities requiring consent of county governments for municipal utility service provision within unincorporated areas.

Support legislation that provides that where a county has, by ordinance, established one or more utility service areas in the unincorporated area and where the county has the current ability to provide service, a municipality may not provide utility services within such county service area(s) without consent of the county.

Counties and municipalities are encouraged to cooperatively establish utility service boundary agreements that will maximize the capacities and efficiencies of their respective systems, with the goal of providing the most cost-effective utility service to system customers.

Consultants Competitive Negotiation Act

Statewide Priority

Requested Action: Support increasing the threshold relating to construction costs and professional fees under continuing contracts pursuant to the Consultants' Competitive Negotiation Act to \$5 million and \$500,000, respectively.

Support increasing the threshold for the construction costs and professional fees under continuing contracts pursuant to the Consultants' Competitive Negotiation Act (CCNA) from the existing thresholds of \$2 million and \$200,000, respectively. The thresholds for bidding continuing contracts have been in place since 2009.

Construction costs have significantly increased since that time, reducing the number of projects allowed without requiring a full bid process. Construction costs expected to be within these limits sometime exceed them, triggering a bidding process midstream, which jeopardizes the integrity of the project and increases administrative costs.

Increasing the threshold, at which services for a project go through a separate solicitation, should have a positive impact on overall project costs and reflects the actual increase in the costs of the service relative to the cost of the entire project.

Florida Recreation Development Assistant Program Funding

Statewide Priority

Requested Action: Support fully funding the Florida Recreation Development Assistant program.

The Florida Department of Environmental Protection is authorized to establish the FRDAP through Section 375.075, Florida Statutes to provide grants to qualified local governmental entities. This competitive grant program provides state funds for the acquisition or development of lands for public outdoor recreational use. However, of the 195 applications received during the 2019 legislative session, 152 projects were scored and ranked on the priority list for consideration with no funding appropriated.

Florida's parks and recreation agencies generate nearly \$7.5 billion in economic activity and support more than 60,000 jobs. Matching state grant dollars with local grant dollars secures a prosperous and diverse tourism industry.

Balance Billing For Emergency Medical Services

Statement of Support

Requested Action: Support the ability of emergency medical services to balance bill patients.

Upon receipt of the associated insurance payment, Marion County Fire Rescue bills the remaining balance to the patient for services rendered during an emergency, excluding Medicare and Medicaid patients.

Prior proposed legislation has sought to eliminate the ability to balance bill patients and has passed for portions of the medical industry, but not emergency medical services.

The annual revenue loss of not balance billing patients would be approximately \$3,000,000. To provide the same level of service would necessitate increased general fund assessment.

The bill has been touted as a savings to the patient. However, this method requires government-based emergency medical service systems (representing the majority of types in Florida) to pass costs onto taxpayers whether or not they have incurred the cost.

Local Government Regulation of COPCN Service Providers

Statement of Support

Requested Action: Support local government regulation of COPCN service providers.

State statute and county ordinance require emergency medical services providers to be permitted by the local county commission. The county commission then has the ability to approve the permit application based on their community's needs and the anticipated impact to the current system.

Recent legislation eliminates the certificate of public convenience and necessity process for hospitals.

This legislation allows Florida-licensed emergency medical service providers to transport patients to and from anywhere in the state. Two resulting scenarios now have the opportunity to occur: 1) patients can now be transported from communities with higher insured populations, and 2) emergency medical service providers can contract transports with facilities such as hospitals, nursing homes and rehabilitation facilities.

Removing the accountability review by the affected county's emergency medical services director would remove the ability of local government to protect the health, safety and welfare of its residents and visitors. This repeal of regulation also has a severe financial impact on the local government's ability to provide emergency medical services.

The College of Central Florida's Legislative Priorities

Statement of Support

Requested Action: Support the College of Central Florida's goal to meet our community's needs for high-skill, high-wage employment opportunities through expanding workforce programs within the education general operations budget.

Requested Action: Support the College of Central Florida's Health Science Technology Education Center within the public education capital outlay budget.

Requested Action: Support funding for the College of Central Florida's job growth grant partnership with Marion County Public Schools.



Marion County Board of County Commissioners

District 1 - David Moore, Vice Chairman

District 2 - Kathy Bryant, Commissioner

District 3 - Jeff Gold, Commissioner

District 4 - Carl Zalak III, Commissioner

District 5 - Michelle Stone, Chairman

Commission Office

352-438-2323

Mounir Bouyounes, County Administrator

mounir.bouyounes@marioncountyfl.org

352-438-2300

Jeannie Rickman, Assistant County Administrator

jeannie.rickman@marioncountyfl.org

352-438-2300

Marion County Board of County Commissioners

601 SE 25th Ave., Ocala, FL 34471