

Freedom First Budget

Statewide Overview and Taxes

The challenges our country has faced over the last two years has placed a microscope on state leadership and response. Such scrutiny has proved Florida’s commitment to liberty, conservative governance, and economic opportunity to be a tried and true formula for success. Through strong, steady leadership, focusing on facts and not fear, Florida weathered the storm of national rises in unemployment, supply chain interruptions, and economic decline, to emerge as one of the fastest recovering states in the Union.

Despite dire projections two years ago, the Florida economy has flourished. State revenues exceeded pre-pandemic estimates by more than \$3 billion over Fiscal Years 2020-21 and 2021-22. The State’s AAA Stable bond rating has been maintained, confirming that Florida “can maintain better credit characteristics than the U.S. in a stress scenario.” Floridians are back to work, back to school, and back to living life with their loved ones. Governor DeSantis will continue to fight for Florida’s families, freedoms, and future.

The Freedom First Budget for Fiscal Year 2022-23 totals \$99.7 billion and continues Governor DeSantis’ commitment to Florida’s K-12 students and teachers, and environmental resources, while maintaining historic reserves, including over \$10.6 billion in General Revenue, to effectively respond to any unforeseen emergency

Of the total \$99.7 billion, the General Revenue portion is \$37 billion. Florida’s total reserves are \$15.3 billion, more than 15 percent of the total budget for the fiscal year, leaving ample resources for any unforeseen circumstances. \$36.3 billion, or 36.4 percent of the total budget, is in federal funds.

Taxpayer Savings

Governor DeSantis’ Fiscal Year 2022-23 budget recommends four tax holidays and the permanent elimination of a fee to allow hard working Floridians to keep more money in their pockets. Florida’s per capita state tax collections of \$2,086 is currently the lowest among all states. In addition to the three sales tax holidays included in the current year budget, Governor DeSantis recommends a Fuel Tax Holiday that will provide a reprieve from high gas prices, as well as the elimination of fees charged for the issuance of a Florida Identification Card. The \$1.172 billion tax cut package includes the following:

- **A Fuel Tax Holiday to Save Florida Families \$1 billion** – The holiday will reduce the tax on motor fuel by \$0.25 per gallon, reducing the financial burden to Florida families from high gas prices.

FREEDOM FIRST BUDGET


FISCAL YEAR 2022-2023

- **A 7-day Freedom Week Sales Tax Holiday to Save Florida Families \$57.4 million** – The holiday covers certain outdoor recreation purchases, such as the first \$100 of the sales price of sunglasses, the first \$200 of the sales price of tents, and the first \$500 of the sales price of kayaks or canoes, as well as tickets for events, museums, the arts, and more.
- **A 10-day Back-to-School Sales Tax Holiday to Save Florida Families \$72.9 million** – The holiday covers clothing up to \$60, school supplies up to \$15, and the first \$1,000 of personal computers and related accessories.
- **A 10-day Disaster Preparedness Sales Tax Holiday to Save Florida Families \$11 million** – The holiday covers items needed during disasters including generators priced at \$1,000 or less.
- **A permanent elimination of the fees charged for obtaining a Florida ID Card to Save Florida Families \$14.7 million** – This will save individuals over the age of five wishing to obtain a Florida Identification (ID) Card \$25. Florida ID Cards issued by the Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles are required to be accepted by any person accepting a driver's license as proof of identification. The Governor's Fiscal Year 2022-23 budget maintains local tax collector revenue by redistributing a portion of the Class E driver license fees.

Florida Reserves

- \$10.6 billion in unallocated General Revenue
- \$3.0 billion in the Budget Stabilization Fund
- \$1.7 billion in unallocated Trust Funds
- **\$15.3 billion in Total Reserves**

Florida Retirement System

Governor DeSantis recommends to increase the employer contribution to the investment accounts of employees participating in the FRS Investment Plan by three percent of the member's salary.

Pension Unfunded Liability – Based on the reduction of the investment return assumption from 7.0 percent to 6.8 percent by the FRS Actuarial Assumptions Estimating Conference on October 7, 2021, the unfunded actuarial liability (UAL) of the Florida Retirement System (FRS) Defined Benefit Program, known as the state's pension program, amounted to \$34.7 billion on June 30, 2021. Based on an actuarial liability of \$209.6 billion and an actuarial value of assets of \$174.9 billion, the program is 83.4 percent funded as of June 30, 2021.

The Governor's Freedom First Budget includes funding to reduce the return assumption toward a more fiscally prudent rate and implement an acceleration of the amortization of

the unfunded liability, which will increase required annual employer contributions to the pension program by approximately \$176 million and will protect the long-term solvency of retirement benefits our state employees, particularly our law enforcement officers, rely on.

State Pay Package

The Freedom First Budget recommends \$453.1 million in pay increases for Florida's state sworn law enforcement officers; state correction, detention, and probation officers; state firefighters; and state employees.

- Governor DeSantis has maintained his commitment to Florida's law enforcement by recommending \$75.4 million in the state pay package to increase the base rate of pay for over 4,500 state sworn law enforcement officers.
 - Entry level sworn law enforcement will receive a 20 percent increase, bringing the average filled position base rate to \$61,200.
 - Non-entry level sworn law enforcement officers will receive a 25 percent increase.
- \$124.2 million to increase the Department of Corrections' base rate of pay to \$20 per hour for specified Correctional Officer, Correctional Probation Officer, and Inspector positions.
- \$11.2 million to increase the base rate of pay to \$17 and \$19 per hour for Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) Detention Officers and DJJ Probation Officers, respectively.
- \$15.9 million for the Department of Corrections to implement a retention plan for correctional officers, correctional probation officers, and inspectors.
- \$1.4 million to increase the salaries of over 580 state firefighters.
- \$225 million to provide pay increases for state employees.
 - Funding can support up to a four percent salary increase for career service employees, at the agencies' discretion to implement based on the individual needs of each agency.

Education

Florida is a national leader in empowering our students and families by providing opportunities for success beginning in early grades and continuing through higher education. Indeed, Florida ranks #3 in the country for K-12 achievement according to the latest Education Week rankings. Governor DeSantis, through this budget, will continue to support our teachers and schools while providing high quality educational choices for all students regardless of circumstance. Building on that momentum, this budget provides key investments in our education systems.

Several key investments include:

- \$600 million, an increase of \$50 million, in funding to continue the state’s priority to raise the minimum K-12 teacher salary to \$47,500, as well as salary increases for veteran teachers and other eligible instructional personnel.
- \$1.4 billion in funding for early child education, including more than \$406 million for Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten (VPK).
- Historic \$23.9 billion in funding, of which \$13.3 billion is record state funding for the K-12 public school system.
 - The appropriated funding covers the costs associated with the current projected enrollment of 2.98 million students.
- \$238 million for one-time \$1,000 retention payments for eligible full time Florida teachers and principals.
- \$1.3 billion in state operating funding for the Florida College System.
- \$2.7 billion in state operating funding for the State University System.
- \$35 million in funding to continue the Open Door Grant Program at Florida’s school district workforce institutions and colleges.
- \$5 million in funding to establish the Law Enforcement Academy Scholarship Program.
- \$1 million in funding to establish the Out-of-State Law Enforcement Equivalency Reimbursement to help cover the cost of law enforcement officers moving to Florida.

Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten

The budget provides a total of more than \$406 million for Florida’s VPK program, a high quality, free education initiative, which serves approximately 158,000 four and five-year olds. VPK prepares each child for kindergarten by building a strong foundation for school and focusing on early literacy skills.

School Readiness

The budget maintains funding provided in the current Fiscal Year 2021-22 that allowed additional children to be served in the School Readiness program, and rewarded School

FREEDOM FIRST BUDGET


FISCAL YEAR 2022-2023

Readiness providers who participate in program assessments and implement quality improvement strategies.

- \$72 million for the School Readiness Program to serve students;
- \$100 million provided in federal funds to increase eligible early learning coalitions' provider reimbursement rates; and
- \$40 million for performance funding for all school readiness providers that participate in program assessment and quality improvement strategies.

The budget also provides \$36.4 million to serve approximately 36,000 at-risk School Readiness eligible four year olds through direct instructional support for reading.

In addition, the following initiatives that support early learning are also maintained at current year funding:

- T.E.A.C.H. – \$10 million for early childhood teacher scholarships;
- Help Me Grow – \$1.8 million to connect children and families with information, resources and developmental services to enhance health, behavior and learning in the development of young children;
- Teacher Training – \$3 million for statewide professional development to improve child care instructor quality; and
- Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY) – \$3.9 million to deliver high-quality School Readiness curriculum directly to parents so they may strengthen the cognitive and early literacy skills of at-risk children.

K-12 Public Education

Governor DeSantis understands that education is the foundation of our future workforce. That is why the budget provides an historic investment in our K-12 education system. This includes the highest per student investment of \$8,000 in the Florida Education Finance Program (FEFP), which is an increase of \$189 over Fiscal Year 2021-22. Governor DeSantis is once again acknowledging our hard working educators by providing classroom teachers and principals an additional \$1,000 payment, as well as additional funding to continuing raising the minimum teacher salary for full-time public classroom teachers toward the goal of \$47,500.

The budget appropriates \$23.9 billion in total funding for the FEFP, which includes the following increases:

- Increase of \$124 in the Base Student Allocation (BSA);
- Increase of \$20 million, for a total of \$140 million for the mental health allocation;
- Increase of \$50 million, for a total of \$600 million to continue increasing the minimum teacher salary for full-time public classroom teachers to the goal of \$47,500 and provide salary increases to Florida's veteran teachers and other instructional personnel;
- Increase of \$30 million, for a total of \$210 million for safe school initiatives; and

- Increase of \$21 million, for a total of \$262.8 million for instructional materials.

School Safety

The Freedom First Budget continues to invest in school safety initiatives, continuing the Governor's commitment to ensuring Florida's students and teachers are in a safe and secure learning environment.

- The budget includes the following school safety initiatives:
 - \$210 million, an increase of \$30 million, for the safe schools component of the FEFP;
 - \$6.5 million is maintained for the Coach Aaron Feis Guardian Program that will be used to certify and train school guardians and provide a one-time stipend of \$500;
 - \$5.5 million is maintained for the Youth Mental Health Awareness and Assistance Training;
 - \$4.15 million, an increase of \$3.5 million is provided for the Florida Safe Schools Assessment Tool;
 - \$3 million is maintained to continue providing a centralized integrated data repository and data analytics resources to improve access to timely, complete and accurate information;
 - \$42 million is maintained for public school hardening grants; and
 - \$6.4 million is maintained to continue providing school districts access to a mobile panic alert system that is capable of connecting multiple first responder agencies.

Protecting Florida's Jewish Day Schools

To continue to address safety concerns for Florida's Jewish communities, Governor DeSantis maintains funding of \$4 million to hire school safety officers, enhance safety measures, upgrade safety equipment, facilities and technology, and increase security services to ensure children at Florida Jewish Day Schools can learn in a safe environment. This funding will be available to all eligible Florida Jewish Day Schools.

Promoting Computer Science

The budget maintains \$10 million to get teachers certified to teach computer science courses, and to provide bonuses to teachers who hold educator certificates or industry certifications in computer science.

Closing K-12 Achievement Gaps

The budget includes \$15.5 million to continue implementation of VPK-Grade 8 screening and progress monitoring tool aligned with the newly adopted B.E.S.T. Standards. Additionally, these funds will allow for the provision of consistent data reporting to help determine personalized interventions for struggling readers and focus areas for statewide professional learning for educators.

K-12 Civics Engagement

\$500,000 is maintained to continue the Florida Civics and Debate Initiative, which creates and expands existing speech and debate programs with a focus on civic education. Since 2020, the Florida Civics and Debate Initiative has grown from being in 11 school districts to adding over 160 debate teams in 48 Florida school districts.

Higher Education

The *U.S. News and World Report* has ranked Florida's higher education system the best in the nation for five consecutive years. Florida boasts five of the Top 100 public universities in the country, including one in the Top 5, and another in the Top 20, while attaining the lowest tuition in the country for public four-year institutions.

The Governor's Freedom First Budget includes state operating funding for Florida's higher education system \$1.3 billion for Florida's state colleges and \$2.7 billion for Florida's state universities.

The budget also maintains \$20.8 million for the Florida Postsecondary Academic Library Network that provides essential library services to Florida College System and State University System institutions. Of the total, \$9 million is provided to Florida colleges and \$11.8 million to Florida universities to provide students with e-resources, technical support, distance learning, and more.

The budget invests \$35 million in state funding to continue the Open Door Grant Program, including \$15 million for School District Workforce Education Institutions and \$20 million for Florida College System institutions. The program is designed to create a demand-driven supply of credentialed workers for high-demand occupations and expand the affordability of workforce training and credentialing.

The Governor also provides \$6 million in total funding to establish two programs to support Law Enforcement Officers.

- \$5 million to establish the Law Enforcement Academy Scholarship Program to cover the cost of law enforcement academies for prospective officers.
- \$1 million to establish of the Out-of-State Law Enforcement Equivalency Reimbursement initiative to cover the cost of the State Officer Certification Exam fee and any necessary equivalency training program for law enforcement officers who relocate to Florida.

Holding the Line on Tuition

The Freedom First Budget does not include any tuition or fee increases for Florida's colleges and universities. Our students and families should not face any additional financial burdens as they are completing their education.

FREEDOM FIRST BUDGET


FISCAL YEAR 2022-2023

Bright Futures

The Freedom First Budget fully funds the projected student enrollment for the Bright Futures Scholarship Program at \$602 million. The budget also includes \$40 million to provide a \$300 stipend for the fall and spring semesters for Florida Academic Scholars to cover the costs of textbooks and college-related expenses.

Performance Funding

The budget maintained the following performance funding at career technical centers, state colleges, and state universities:

- \$6.5 million for students earning industry certifications in high-skill, high-demand areas at career technical centers;
- \$14 million for students earning industry certifications in high-skill, high-demand areas at Florida colleges;
- \$25 million in performance funding for state colleges through the 2+2 Student Success Incentive Fund and the Work Florida Student Success Incentive Fund; and
- \$560 million in performance funding for state universities.

Workforce Initiatives

The budget includes over \$534 million to support workforce education programs to ensure Florida students are prepared to fill high-demand, high-wage jobs, and help Florida meet its goal of becoming first in the nation for workforce education by 2030.

This includes \$15 million, an increase of \$5 million, for the Governor's Pathways to Career Opportunities Grant Program to establish or expand pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programs for high school and college students.

The Freedom First Budget also includes \$100 million for a workforce development capitalization incentive. Grants to be used for instructional equipment, laboratory equipment, supplies, or other expenses associated with a workforce development program.

Historically Black Colleges and Universities

The budget provides approximately \$122 million for Florida's Historically Black Colleges and Universities.

- \$16.96 million in operating funds for Bethune-Cookman University.
- \$7 million in operating funds for Florida Memorial University.
- \$7.4 million in operating funds for Edward Waters College.
- \$90.3 million in operating funds for Florida A&M University.

Education Infrastructure

FREEDOM FIRST BUDGET


FISCAL YEAR 2022-2023

The budget provides \$428.5 million in state for the following education capital outlay initiatives:

- **School Safety Grants**
 - \$42 million for school safety grants provided to school districts to assist with costs associated with improving the physical security of K-12 school buildings.
- **Special Facility Construction**
 - \$85 million contingency fund to cover increasing costs related to Special Facility Construction projects for Baker, Bradford, Calhoun, Jackson, Levy, and Okeechobee counties, so these important projects can be completed regardless of rising costs from inflation.
- **Maintenance**
 - \$190.9 million for public charter school maintenance;
 - This funds the necessary infrastructure for charter schools without utilizing any of the school districts' local funds.
 - \$69.3 million for maintenance at the state colleges;
 - \$8.1 million for lab school maintenance;
 - \$3.2 million for the Florida School for the Deaf and the Blind maintenance; and
 - \$5 million for public broadcasting stations to correct health and safety issues and building deficiencies, and to complete renovations at public broadcasting stations.
- **Freedom Tower**
 - \$25 million to preserve, refurbish, and enhance Miami Dade College's Freedom Tower, a symbol of freedom and democracy.

Environment

Florida's environmental resources are vital to our state's well-being. Since taking office, Governor DeSantis has implemented major reforms to achieve more now for Florida's environment. Under the Governor's leadership, record funding for Everglades restoration and the protection of water resources was appropriated for the current year, and the Fiscal Year 2022-23 budget builds upon these significant investments.

Protection of Florida's environment remains a key focus of the Freedom First Budget, with significant investments made for Fiscal Year 2022-23. As part of more than \$4.4 billion in funding to protect our environment, agriculture and natural resources, the budget includes over \$2.2 billion specifically for the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP).

Continued Improvements for Water Quality, Quantity and Supply

In Executive Order 19-12, among other major environmental reforms, Governor DeSantis called for \$2.5 billion to be invested over four years for the protection of water resources, an increase of \$1 billion over the previous four years. After only three years in office, we are close to reaching that goal by securing over \$2 billion. The Fiscal Year 2022-23 budget continues this investment, by dedicating more than \$980 million for Everglades restoration and the protection of water resources. This level of investment would bring the four year total to more than \$3 billion, doubling the investment of the previous four years.

The Freedom First Budget includes more than \$660 million for Everglades restoration projects, including:

- \$86.5 million for Restoration Strategies.
- \$372 million for the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP), which includes \$175 million for expedited CERP projects.
- \$69 million for the EAA Reservoir to continue the momentum of this critical project to reduce harmful discharges and help send more clean water south of the Everglades.
- \$50 million is included for specific project components designed to achieve the greatest reductions in harmful discharges to the Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie Estuaries as identified in the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan Lake Okeechobee Watershed Restoration Project Draft Integrated Project Implementation Report and Environmental Impact Statement dated July 2018.
- \$83.3 million is included for the Northern Everglades and Estuaries Protection Program.

The Freedom First Budget also includes \$195 million for targeted water quality improvements to achieve significant, meaningful and measurable nutrient reductions in key waterbodies across the state and to implement the initial recommendations of the Blue-Green Algae Task Force. This includes:

FREEDOM FIRST BUDGET


FISCAL YEAR 2022-2023

- \$125 million for the wastewater grant program for projects to construct, upgrade or expand wastewater facilities, to provide advanced wastewater treatment and to convert from septic to sewer.
- \$50 million to accelerate projects to meet scientific nutrient reduction goals, called Total Maximum Daily Loads, which may include green infrastructure investments or land conservation to protect our water resources.
- \$20 million for critical infrastructure including wastewater and stormwater projects that address water quality impairments and coral reef restoration in Biscayne Bay.

On top of the investment in targeted water quality improvements, the budget includes \$50 million to restore Florida's world-renowned springs. This funding may also be used for land acquisition to protect springsheds and is crucial to supporting homeowners and local communities as they work with the state to achieve septic and nutrient reduction requirements.

The Freedom First Budget includes \$100 million for the continued stabilization, water treatment, and closure at Piney Point.

The budget supports a \$35 million investment to improve water quality and combat the effects and impacts of harmful algal blooms, including blue-green algae and red tide. The budget includes the following:

- \$15 million for innovative technologies and short-term solutions to aid in the prevention, cleanup and mitigation of harmful algal blooms, which is a \$5 million increase over the current year.
- \$10.8 million to increase water quality monitoring, support the Blue-Green Algae Task Force, and to maintain and improve the water quality public information portal.
- \$5 million to assist county governments with their responses to emergency biological debris conditions associated with red tide events that may impact public health, Florida's environment and fragile ecosystems, including beaches and wildlife.
- \$4.2 million in funding for continued support of research activities conducted by the Center for Red Tide Research and long-term collaborative partnerships among FWC, the University of South Florida College of Marine Science and Mote Marine Laboratory.

\$40 million for the alternative water supply grant program to help communities plan for and implement vital conservation, reuse and other alternative water supply projects. DEP will continue to engage local governments, industry, universities and water management districts to identify and research all viable alternative water supply sources and is working to provide an assessment of funding needs critical to supporting Florida's growing economy.

Further Protection of our Valuable and Vulnerable Coastlines

Last year, Governor DeSantis championed the passage of the Resilient Florida Grant Program which enhances our efforts to protect our inland waterways, coastlines, shores and coral reefs, which serve as invaluable natural defenses against sea level rise.

The Freedom First Budget invests over \$550 million for resiliency, specifically \$52 million for resiliency planning and coral reef protection and \$500 million for implementation of statewide resilience projects.

Protecting Florida's 1,300 miles of coastline is critical to our growing economy and quality of life, as millions travel from around the world to visit our world-renowned beaches. The budget includes \$50 million in beach nourishment funding to continue addressing Florida's critically eroded shorelines.

Investing in Clean Lands and Air

The Freedom First Budget includes \$137 million for the cleanup of contaminated sites with a focus on promoting redevelopment of these areas once cleanup has been completed. Working with federal and local partners, cleanup and redevelopment of these sites will ensure Florida's new businesses and growing communities can safely develop and our economy can continue to grow. Specific investments include:

- \$125 million for Petroleum Tanks Cleanup;
- \$7 million for Dry Cleaning Solvent Contaminated Site Cleanup;
- \$4 million for Hazardous Waste Contaminated Site Cleanup; and
- \$1 million to assist homeowners with Perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) and Perfluorooctane Sulfonate (PFOS) contaminants.

The Freedom First Budget also includes \$53 million for the implementation of the State Mitigation Plan for the \$166 million Volkswagen Clean Air Act settlement. The plan addresses diesel emission reductions, including funds for electric vehicle infrastructure and electric buses.

A Commitment to Florida's Prized Properties and Waters

The Freedom First Budget includes \$151.7 million to protect our prized properties and waters in Florida. This funding will ensure all Floridians have access to enjoy our pristine natural environment, while protecting these unique natural resources and investing in the management of our state-owned lands.

As land acquisition is vital to both our economic growth and environmental protection, the Freedom First Budget includes \$100 million for the Florida Forever Program, the state's premier conservation and recreation land acquisition program. This includes:

FREEDOM FIRST BUDGET


FISCAL YEAR 2022-2023

- \$75 million for the Division of State Lands to acquire land with a focus on protecting our water resources for Floridians and visitors.
- \$15 million for the Florida Communities Trust component of Florida Forever, which provides funding to local governments and eligible non-profit environmental organizations for the acquisition of community-based parks, open space and greenways that further outdoor recreation and natural resource protection needs.
- \$10 million for the Florida Recreation Development Assistance Program (FRDAP), which provides competitive recreational grants to local governments for the acquisition and/or development of land for public outdoor recreation.

Florida's State Parks have won the National Gold Medal a record four times for having the best state park system in the nation. The budget dedicates \$51.7 million to infrastructure improvements and resource management with the goal of maintaining this high standard, and ensuring all visitors and residents alike have access to these prized properties for generations to come.

Protecting Florida's Manatee Population

The budget includes \$3.8 million for the care and management of manatees. Specific investments include:

- \$2.9 million to enhance and expand the network of specialized acute care facilities to treat injured and distressed manatees;
- \$718,000 and two full-time positions for Manatee Rescue and Mortality Response to enhance monitoring and research support;
- \$160,000 for Manatee Management including aerial surveys to study and document aquatic systems where manatee presence is either not well understood or there is a need for documented expansion of their range.

Defending Florida's Everglades from Invasive Species

Governor DeSantis has prioritized efforts to remove Burmese pythons from the Everglades. Pythons are an invasive species that disrupt the natural food chain balance and have no natural predators, causing them to multiply without impediment and further threaten endangered species. The Freedom First Budget includes up to \$3 million for the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission to remove pythons from the Everglades, an increase of \$2 million over current year.

Investing in Florida's Agriculture

The Freedom First Budget includes more than \$1.7 billion for Florida's agricultural industry. In order to preserve Florida's iconic citrus industry, the budget invests \$29.2 million for citrus research, the Citrus Health Response Program and for consumer awareness marketing efforts. This includes \$15 million for the Department of Citrus in State Fiscal Recovery Funds for the expansion of the eCommerce and digital marketing program, which is focused on driving sales of Florida Citrus products through eCommerce

FREEDOM FIRST BUDGET


FISCAL YEAR 2022-2023

partnerships with retail grocers and online shopping platforms while increasing awareness of the health benefits and premium quality of Florida Citrus through traditional, digital and social channels.

Also, recognizing how important it is to effectively combat wildfires, the budget includes \$6.7 million for wildfire suppression equipment and \$4 million for road and bridge maintenance to allow for better access for land management and wildfire suppression activities.

Transportation and Economic Development

As we approach the end of 2021, it's become abundantly clear that under the leadership of Governor DeSantis Florida's prudent "open for business" approach to managing the challenges of COVID-19 has paid huge dividends. Unlike many other states which curtailed commerce and personal freedoms through draconian measures like lockdowns, mask requirements, and vaccine mandates, Florida followed the science and kept its economy open and poised for continued growth. The wisdom of this approach continues to be seen in Florida's steady decrease in unemployment, the creation of jobs, and the ongoing development of its world class infrastructure.

As Florida continues to flourish, the Freedom First Budget provides the resources for transportation and economic development that will ensure continued growth and prosperity. Significant investments are proposed in critical areas like job creation, affordable housing, roads and other transportation infrastructure, tourism growth, and rural broadband development.

Ensuring Housing Availability and Affordability for Florida's Families

Governor DeSantis has always recognized the importance of recommending significant resources in the state budget for increasing the development and availability of affordable housing. The Freedom First Budget provides \$355.5 million to fully fund the Sadowski Affordable Housing Trust Funds.

- \$95 million for the State Apartment Incentive Loan (SAIL) Program, and
- \$220.5 million for the State Housing Initiatives Partnership Program (SHIP).

The Freedom First Budget provides \$40 million to establish a revolving loan program to support workforce homeownership, including down payment assistance and closing cost assistance.

Disaster Recovery/Emergency Management

One of the key elements underpinning Florida's economic success has been its ongoing ability to plan for, respond to, and recover from significant disasters. The Freedom First Budget provides significant funding for disaster recovery, mitigation and emergency management, including:

Division of Emergency Management

Open Federally Declared Disasters – Funding to Communities and State Operations

- \$664 million in federal and state funding is provided so that communities and the state can respond to and recover from major disasters or emergencies as well as mitigate against future disasters or emergencies.
 - \$104 million in state match is provided for the state cost share associated with authorized federal funding to eligible local and state recipients for

FREEDOM FIRST BUDGET


FISCAL YEAR 2022-2023

reimbursement of the response and recovery cost, as well as state management costs relating to federally declared disasters.

- The Freedom First Budget includes \$22 million to continue Florida's response efforts for the COVID-19 pandemic.
- \$10 million to support eight Florida Urban Search and Rescue Teams
- \$75 million for state of the art warehouses to modernize Florida's inventory of response equipment to respond to any future needs.
- \$80 million to complete the new Statewide Emergency Operations Center that will meet operational needs through year 2050.

Department of Economic Opportunity Community Development Block Grant

The Freedom First Budget includes an estimate of over \$473 million in federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds directed toward local hurricane recovery and hardening efforts throughout the state. These funds include several CDBG programs, including CDBG Disaster Recovery Program for all named hurricanes since 2017 and the CDBG Mitigation Program.

Homeowner Assistance Fund

The Freedom First Budget includes \$608.5 million in federal Homeowner Assistance Funds to help mitigate some of the COVID-19 financial hardships experienced by Florida homeowners after January 21, 2020 associated with COVID-19, by providing funds to help prevent mortgage delinquencies, defaults, foreclosures, loss of utilities or home energy services, and displacement through payment of qualified expenses related to mortgages and housing.

Revolving Loan Fund Program

The Freedom First Budget includes \$16 million to support the Rebuild Florida Revolving Loan Program in areas affected by Hurricane Michael. This program, supported by an award from the U.S. Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration, assists businesses with disaster related economic changes, and can be used to address capital needs and help businesses implement plans for resiliency to protect against future storms.

Reemployment Application System

The Freedom First Budget includes \$4.2 million for the Stop Inmate Fraud Program, designed to detect fraudulent public assistance activity, including reemployment assistance, by incarcerated individuals, helping to ensure that only those eligible are receiving government benefits.

Pandemic First Responders Retention Payments

FREEDOM FIRST BUDGET


FISCAL YEAR 2022-2023

The Freedom First Budget includes \$220 million for a second round of relief payments of \$1,000 to reward Florida's First Responders for their public service.

Law Enforcement Officers

The Freedom First Budget includes \$25 million in bonus payments for law enforcement officers who are new to the profession in the state, including those relocating from other states. This initiative will provide bonus payments of \$5,000 to eligible law enforcement officers.

Illegal Immigration

The Freedom First Budget includes \$8 million to implement a program to assist the state's efforts to protect against harms resulting from illegal immigration, and may include the transport of unauthorized aliens located within the state to other states within the United States of America, or the District of Columbia.

The Freedom First Budget also includes nearly \$2.4 million and 16 FTE for investigator and law enforcement positions at the Florida Departments of Law Enforcement and Economic Opportunity in order to support the verification of employment eligibility authorized in section 448.095(3)(e), Florida Statutes.

Consumer-first Workforce System

For ongoing support of legislation passed that will comprehensively overhaul Florida's workforce training and development system, the Freedom First Budget includes additional funding of \$100 million to implement the Consumer-first Workforce System.

Economic Recovery and Development

As Florida continues to experience post-COVID-19 economic growth, it is more important than ever to maintain our state's economic momentum through targeted investments in programs that support the creation of good jobs for Floridians and promote key Florida industries like tourism. The Freedom First Budget provides substantial funding for such initiatives, including:

- \$100 million for the Job Growth Grant Fund to support local infrastructure and job training projects targeted towards economic recovery and development.
- \$50 million in recurring funds for VISIT FLORIDA's marketing programs to continue showcasing that Florida is once again open and safe for tourists from throughout the U.S. and the world.

Among its many economic advantages, Florida's rural areas represent a tremendous opportunity to establish a model for growth and prosperity that builds on the latest technologies and is in sync with an evolving 21st century economy. One of the key elements to this approach is a focus on developing modern infrastructure in rural areas, including a strong commitment to providing the infrastructure needed to make broadband Internet service widely available in Florida's rural communities. The budget continues the state's

FREEDOM FIRST BUDGET


FISCAL YEAR 2022-2023

ongoing commitment to developing economic growth opportunities in rural areas, including:

- \$105 million, an increase of \$100 million over the current year, for the Rural Infrastructure Fund to support local rural infrastructure projects such as roads, storm and wastewater systems, and telecommunications facilities.
- \$1.17 million for the Rural Community Development Revolving Loan Program to provide local governments with access to financial assistance to further promote the economic viability of Florida's rural communities.
- \$8.5 million for Technical Assistance, Planning, and Site Development Grants primarily focused on rural areas.

Ensuring Fair, Free, and Safe Elections

Florida is known as a national leader in conducting fair and accurate elections. Nevertheless, continued vigilance and oversight is needed to ensure that the integrity of Florida elections is always maintained, and that those who commit election fraud or other election law violations are found and punished. The Freedom First Budget provides resources needed to ensure our future elections are conducted with the utmost integrity and are safe from cyber threats, fraud, and any other election irregularities.

- The Freedom First Budget includes \$39.8 million for state-level election oversight activities, with a focus on election integrity and security. This includes:
 - \$5.7 million to create and staff an Office of Election Crimes and Security that will investigate election crimes and fraud. The office will contain 52 staff members, including 20 sworn law enforcement officers and 25 non-sworn investigators. The office will review and investigate election crimes and irregularities and make referrals for further legal action directly to a Statewide Prosecutor.
 - \$8 million for the Supervisors of Elections to continue cybersecurity initiatives and improvements to their systems.
 - \$13 million for security improvements and enhancements to election technology, such as the Florida Voter Registration System, the Online Voter Registration System, and the Campaign Finance System.
 - \$575,000 for the Department of State to continue the contract with the Electronic Information Center (ERIC) to improve the accuracy of voter registration rolls and increase access to voter registration for all eligible citizens.

The Florida Elections Commission within the Department of Legal Affairs has seen an increase in caseloads related to election violations. The Freedom First Budget invests more than \$1.1 million to enhance elections security, including:

- \$901,284 and six FTE to address cases brought forward from the proposed Office of Election Crimes and Security within the Florida Department of State. This office will

FREEDOM FIRST BUDGET


FISCAL YEAR 2022-2023

make criminal referrals directly to the Statewide Prosecutor who will investigate allegations of violations of Florida's election laws; and

- \$210,251 and two FTE to hire additional attorneys within the Florida Elections Commission in order to address a growing investigatory and prosecutorial caseload.

Supporting Florida Arts and Culture

The budget includes funding for Florida's arts and culture communities:

- \$5 million for Cultural and Museum Grants to support projects that further the state's cultural objectives.
- \$500,000 to support the Florida African-American Heritage Preservation Network (FAAHPN). FAAHPN is a resource for institutions, individuals, and agencies where intellectual property, oral histories, artifacts, and cultural treasures are needed to carry out major themes and programs.

Champlain Towers South Memorial

The Freedom First Budget includes \$2.5 million, earmarked towards a Champlain Towers South Memorial to pay respect to those impacted by the Surfside Building Collapse.

Improving Technology for Vehicle Services

Funding is provided throughout the Freedom First Budget to improve services that impact Floridians everyday life, such as driver's license, vehicle registration, and vehicle title services. This funding includes:

- \$250,000 to support a Blockchain Title Pilot Program within the Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles. The purpose of the pilot program is to evaluate potential concepts, designs, and technologies to maintain and make available certificates of motor vehicle title through blockchain technology, and to determine the feasibility of providing to the public a permanent option to obtain or transfer certificates of title using blockchain technology.
- \$9.9 million for the sixth year of the Motorist Modernization Phase II project that continues to modernize the motor vehicle service experience for Floridians.

Transportation Infrastructure

Florida is currently home to almost 22 million people and welcomes millions of visitors each year. As a high growth state, being able to move an increasing number of people and goods from place to place quickly and effectively depends on a continuing commitment to developing and maintaining a world class transportation infrastructure.

The Freedom First Budget includes \$10.4 billion for the Florida Department of Transportation. This investment will provide for the retention and creation of more than 155,000 jobs. Every dollar invested in transportation is estimated to result in a return of up to \$4 in user and economic benefits to Florida's residents and businesses, and also helps diversify Florida's economy.

FREEDOM FIRST BUDGET


FISCAL YEAR 2022-2023

Within this amount, the Freedom First Budget provides \$9.27 billion for the State Transportation Work Program, which is an ongoing five-year plan for the implementation and completion of transportation infrastructure projects. These projects include construction and maintenance of Florida's roads, bridges, rails, seaports and other public transportation systems that grow the state's economy and improve the quality of life for our citizens. Within the budget the Work Program includes:

- \$3.6 billion for highway construction to include 138 new lane miles.
- \$1.2 billion in resurfacing to include 2,637 lane miles.
- \$117.3 million in seaport infrastructure improvements, to ensure Florida's ports continue to have capacity while the rest of the nation struggles from supply chain backups at seaports.
- \$297.2 million for aviation improvements.
- \$185.5 million in scheduled repairs for 52 bridges and replacement of 17 bridges.
- \$597.7 million investment in rail and transit projects.
- \$154.9 million for safety initiatives.

Health and Human Services

The Freedom First Budget provides support to those who find themselves facing some of life's greatest challenges. Governor DeSantis continues his unwavering commitment to prioritizing Seniors First by providing additional community-based services to ensure more Floridians can age in place in their homes. The Freedom First Budget provides assistance to individuals who are combating the opioid epidemic and also to those who are utilizing services within the child welfare system. Additionally, the Governor is increasing funding for Floridians with disabilities and the Freedom First Budget ensures that Florida's veterans who have faithfully served our nation receive the care they deserve.

Cancer

Florida is fortunate to have top quality medical facilities. The Freedom First Budget invests \$100 million in funding for Florida's National Cancer Institute Program, which is an increase of more than \$37 million over current year funding. This additional funding will continue to enhance Florida's competitiveness in cancer research and care at national and international levels and helps ensure that all Floridians have access to the highest quality of care.

Child Welfare

The Freedom First Budget includes \$133.9 million to provide services to those served by the child welfare system. This funding will provide operational support and community based services, foster parent support and modernization of the Florida Safe Families Network (FSFN) system.

Additionally, the budget includes \$11.2 million for maintenance adoption subsidies and adoption benefits for state employees to support adoptions of children from foster care. The Governor recognizes the important role of foster parents and the impact they have on the life of a child in need. The Freedom First Budget also includes \$8.9 million for an increase of up to \$300 per month to the childcare subsidy for foster parents by assisting them in covering the cost of early education and child care.

Early Childhood Courts

Florida is the only state in the nation with an Early Childhood Court program and the Freedom First Budget includes \$2.1 million in new funding for the Department of Children and Families and State Courts to support this program. The Freedom First Budget will provide a dedicated funding source to support the current participants and the expansion of the Early Childhood Court programs across the State of Florida Judicial Circuits. The Early Childhood Court program allows courts to take what is currently known about the appropriate services and best practices for early brain development and make them available to the most vulnerable children.

FREEDOM FIRST BUDGET


FISCAL YEAR 2022-2023

Opioid

By working with local partners and families the Freedom First Budget continues to make strides in ensuring that individuals who are affected by this crisis receive necessary services. The budget includes more than \$82 million in total funding. This funding will provide evidence based prevention services and supports, medication assisted treatment, recovery services and will enhance drug overdose surveillance.

Behavioral Health

The need for behavioral health services is increasing across the state. The Freedom First Budget provides \$188.6 million in funding for community based behavioral health services, forensic bed capacity, and operations of the state mental health treatment facilities. Additionally, this funding will provide a comprehensive array of behavioral health treatment services that seek to reduce overdoses, suicides, unemployment and help break the cycle of hospitalization and homelessness.

Putting Seniors First

The Freedom First Budget invests an additional \$10 million in funding for over 1,000 seniors to receive services through the Alzheimer's Disease Initiative and the Community Care for Elderly Program. These programs will support activities of daily living, medical assistance and caregiver support to keep seniors in their homes.

The Freedom First Budget also provides \$15 million in funding, which is an increase in \$10 million over current year funding to support Alzheimer's Disease Research. This funding will enhance diagnosis and prevention strategies for those impacted by this disease.

The Freedom First Budget also provides additional resources for the Office of Public and Professional Guardians to ensure the protection of vulnerable seniors. This funding will provide for more effective monitoring to ensure the compliance of public and professional guardians.

Veterans

The Freedom First Budget invests \$63.4 million to support equipment updates, capital improvements, medical costs for nursing home residents and the remaining staffing needs for the Ardie R. Copas and Lake Baldwin State Veterans' Nursing Homes. The budget also includes more than \$2 million to assist veterans in training, networking and mentoring throughout the state. Additionally, the Freedom First Budget provides \$350,000 for a veteran's suicide prevention program that will assist Florida's veterans and their families obtain the services and assistance they need.

Persons with Disabilities

The Freedom First Budget provides \$25.5 million in new funding to allow an additional 480 individuals in crisis to be served through the Agency for Persons with Disabilities waiver

FREEDOM FIRST BUDGET


FISCAL YEAR 2022-2023

program. The Freedom First Budget also provides \$1 million for supported employment to assist approximately 650 people with intellectual disabilities achieve employment or internships.

Direct Care Staff

As Florida continues to lead, it is vital that we ensure that our healthcare workforce is taken care of as they have taken care of us during this challenging time. The Freedom First Budget includes \$226.5 million through increased rates to support higher pay for direct care staff in Home and Community Based Settings in the Agency for Health Care Administration and the Agency for Persons with Disabilities. These individuals have continued to answer the call and provide services to some of our most vulnerable residents.

Public Safety

Governor DeSantis has made public safety a top priority and has taken bold steps to protect all Floridians. Due to the hard work of Florida's law enforcement officers, our crime rate decreased last year, marking the 50th consecutive year the state has seen a drop in its crime rate. The Freedom First Budget continues to make necessary investments in our public safety, including funding for safer and more modern correctional facilities, information technology enhancements, workload concerns, and statewide prosecution issues.

Salary Increases for Correctional and Law Enforcement positions

Recognizing the vital work that Correctional and Law Enforcement personnel perform in order to keep Floridians safe, the Freedom First Budget includes \$153.1 million to provide salary increases across various Public Safety offices. These salary increases include:

- \$124.2 million to increase the Department of Corrections' base rate of pay to \$20 per hour for specified Correctional Officer, Correctional Probation Officer, and Inspector positions;
- \$11.2 million to increase the base rate of pay to \$17 and \$19 per hour for Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) Detention Officers and DJJ Probation Officers, respectively.
- \$6.1 million to provide for a 20 percent increase in salary for entry-level sworn Law Enforcement positions within the Department of Legal Affairs, the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, the Justice Administrative Commission, and the State Courts System.
- \$11.6 million to provide for a 25 percent increase in salary for non-entry-level sworn Law Enforcement positions within the Department of Legal Affairs, the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, the Justice Administrative Commission, and the State Courts System.

Prison Modernization

The Freedom First Budget includes \$5 million for the Department of Corrections (FDC) to develop a comprehensive prison modernization and position alignment analysis. This analysis will define the economic and demographic trends facing Florida over the next several decades and make recommendations for the most efficient and cost-effective approach to meeting FDC's staffing and aging infrastructure challenges.

Enhancing Information Technology Infrastructure and Security

The Freedom First Budget includes \$20.7 million to enhance and modernize the FDC information technology infrastructure and security. These funds include:

- \$15 million to begin year one of a five-year plan to modernize FDC's 40-year-old mainframe system, the Offender Based Information System (OBIS); and
- \$5.6 million to procure a combination of tools and services needed to provide for improvements to FDC's Information Technology (IT) infrastructure.

FREEDOM FIRST BUDGET


FISCAL YEAR 2022-2023

Safer Correctional Facilities

The Freedom First Budget includes \$17.8 million and 12 FTE to improve staffing levels at the Florida Department of Corrections. This funding includes:

- \$15.8 million to continue implementing a targeted retention pay plan for the Correctional Officers series, the Correctional Probation Officers series, and the Inspector series that aims to address exceptionally high turnover rates by providing a \$1,000 pay increase at two years of service, a \$1,500 pay increase at five years of service, and a \$2,500 pay increase at eight years of service;
- \$1.9 million and 12 FTE to hire statewide recruitment staffing as well as contract with a marketing firm to develop and implement a marketing campaign to broaden the reach of FDC's recruitment efforts.

Safer Correctional Operations

The Freedom First Budget also includes \$6.5 million and 18 FTE for the Department of Corrections to make Florida's correctional facilities safer. This includes:

- \$5 million for security equipment, such as biometric identification and electronic key systems, drone support for K-9 operations, body scanners, and cameras;
- \$1.1 million and 14 FTE for year two of a multi-year plan to add a correctional officer sergeant to collect security threat group (i.e., gang) intelligence at each main facility and annex; and
- \$341,000 and four FTE to hire additional professional development, training, and support staff to continuously provide quality instructional products and training to ensure staff are both initially trained and that they maintain requisite certifications over time.

Improving Inmate Health and Well-Being

The Freedom First Budget includes \$31.3 million and 43 FTE for the Department of Corrections to improve inmate health and well-being. This funding includes:

- \$1.3 million and ten FTE to create two additional Behavioral Risk Management Teams (BRMT) to provide specialized on-site monitoring of high-risk facilities to ensure inmates with mental health needs have access to appropriate services;
- \$2.5 million and 33 FTE to hire death-row movement correctional positions to ensure death-row inmates are afforded out-of-cell activity time as well as relieve the burden currently placed on the security roster by specially assigning staff to supervise this high-profile population;
- An increase of \$20 million for FDC to improve inmate health and well-being, decrease inmate idleness and violence, address aging infrastructure, and reduce recidivism; and
- An increase of \$7.5 million to renovate inmate wellness and program space statewide by increasing and improving program spaces, renovating recreation yards, and creating walking tracks for inmates.

Statewide Prosecution Needs

The Freedom First Budget includes over \$900,000 and six FTE for additional Assistant Statewide Prosecutor positions in the Office of Statewide Prosecution (OSP) within the Department of Legal Affairs. These positions will work to protect Floridians and address prosecutorial needs relating to organized retail theft and cases stemming from the newly established Gaming Control Commission.

Implementing a Statewide Behavioral Threat Assessment Strategy

The Freedom First Budget includes \$1.3 million and three FTE to the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE) for year two of the implementation of the Statewide Behavioral Threat Assessment Management (BTAM) strategy. Florida's BTAM strategy will use Regional Threat Assessment Task Forces throughout the state that will better-enable law enforcement to identify individuals on a pathway to violence and prevent such individuals from committing targeted acts of violence. These funds will also improve FDLE's ability to identify and analyze data, which will strengthen Florida's BTAM strategy and allow the agency to proactively address modern threats to public safety.

Protecting Floridians from Cyber Fraud

The Freedom First Budget includes over \$540,000 and six FTE for FDLE to combat cyber fraud. Recommended funds will help to combat the increase in cyber fraud victimizing Floridians, including Florida's vulnerable elderly population.

Enhancing Florida's Crime Databases

FDLE is responsible for maintaining of variety of databases that law enforcement uses daily to investigate crimes and apprehend criminals. Many of these resources are also accessible to the public, which helps keep Floridians safe. The Freedom First Budget invests more than \$7.6 million to expand and enhance these databases, including:

- \$3.5 million to begin the modernization of the Biometric Identification Solution (BIS) database;
- \$863,316 for the second year of the Statewide Sexual Assault Tracking System;
- \$2.4 million to complete the transition to the Florida Incident-Based Reporting System (FIBRS); and
- \$888,488 to complete the Uniform Arrest Affidavit (UAA) project.

Supporting State Attorneys

The Freedom First Budget includes over \$1.8 million to provide necessary resources to Florida's state attorneys:

- \$300,000 and three FTE to assist the State Attorney's Office of the Seventeenth Judicial Circuit with the workload associated with the Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force.

FREEDOM FIRST BUDGET


FISCAL YEAR 2022-2023

- Over \$100,000 and one FTE to help with the increased workload associated with investigating and prosecuting gun offenses committed by convicted felons in the State Attorney's Office of the Eleventh Judicial Circuit.
- Over \$800,000 and nine FTE to establish Career Criminal Units (CCUs) in three State Attorney's Offices that collaborate with local law enforcement partners, focusing solely on these offenders in order to protect Florida communities from repeat felony offenders. This funding includes:
 - \$177,834 and two FTE for the State Attorney's Office in the Fifth Judicial Circuit;
 - \$262,033 and three FTE for the State Attorney's Office in the Nineteenth Judicial Circuit; and
 - \$380,263 and four FTE for the State Attorney's Office in the Twentieth Judicial Circuit.
- Over \$630,000 and seven FTE to protect Floridians against human trafficking through the investigation and prosecution of human trafficking crimes. This funding includes:
 - \$378,579 and four FTE for the continuation and expansion of the Human Trafficking Unit and Task Force in the State Attorney's Office in the Eleventh Judicial Circuit; and
 - \$256,226 and three FTE for the creation of a Human Trafficking Unit with a focus on child sex trafficking in the State Attorney's Office in the Twentieth Judicial Circuit.

Department of Legal Affairs Attorney Pay Increase

The Freedom First Budget invests \$3 million to provide a \$6,000 pay increase to over 400 attorneys at the Department of Legal Affairs.

Legal Representation to Children

The Freedom First Budget includes over \$4 million and 67.5 FTE to increase Guardian ad Litem (GAL) staff throughout the state. The additional funds will allow the GAL Program to meet its statutory obligation of providing legal representation to all eligible children in care.

At-Risk Youth Programs and Prevention Services

Effective prevention programs reduce the likelihood that a child will have future involvement with the juvenile justice system. Recent investments in such programs have played a critical role in reducing juvenile arrest rates to its lowest in 44 years. The Freedom First Budget includes \$14 million to fund prevention programs for at-risk youth. This includes funding for the following programs:

- **Youth Challenge Program** – \$5.8 million for a residential program at Camp Blanding that provides 16 to 18-year-olds who withdraw or are removed from

school with opportunities such as high school credit recovery, career-technical education, and life preparation classes.

- **Mentoring Initiatives** – \$8.2 million for the Department of Education to contract with mentoring programs throughout the state.

Military Support

Establishment of the Florida State Guard

As the Florida National Guard continues to provide emergency response efforts in unprecedented volumes both in Florida and nationally, and as federal mandates threaten to weaken the force, it is critical that Florida has the force strength available for response. In order to ensure response needs are met, the Freedom First Budget provides \$5.4 million to establish the Florida State Guard, a civilian volunteer force, to assist the National Guard in state-specific emergencies.

- Funding supports necessary training and equipment for up to 400 members to support units related to medical, logistics, communications, and other support functions that are needed during responses to hurricanes, natural disasters, and other state emergencies.
- Following the Governor’s announcement of the Florida State Guard, the Florida National Guard has received an outpouring of volunteer interest leading to the Governor’s decision to double the proposed force size.

Supporting Military and Their Families

The Freedom First Budget provides \$15.8 million for Florida’s military presence and families, which funds the State’s support of military research and development. This includes:

- \$2 million for the Florida Defense Support Task Force
- \$1.6 million for the Defense Infrastructure Program
- \$12.2 million to support scholarships for children and spouses of deceased or disabled veterans

National Guard Readiness Center Expansion

The Freedom First Budget includes over \$100 million to support our National Guard and emergency response capabilities. This includes:

- \$87.5 million from the federal State Fiscal Recovery Fund to build three new readiness centers in Homestead, Gainesville and Malabar and expand the existing readiness center in Miramar, to support the housing and training of 1,500 additional service members and sustain growing recruitment needs.
- \$8.9 million for armory maintenance.
- \$2.2 million for a new headquarters building for the National Guard Counter Drug Program.
- \$5.1 million to fully support Florida National Guardsmen seeking higher education degrees.

General Government

Governor DeSantis continues to build upon his significant investment in modernizing state government through enhancing cybersecurity threat protections, improving working environments, promoting ease of access to law enforcement training, and expanding resources for mental health services.

Maintaining and Improving the Florida Facilities Pool

The Freedom First Budget invests more than \$8.3 million in the Florida Facilities Pool to ensure safe and efficient working environments for employees and visitors at state owned buildings. The continued investment will address needed building updates throughout the state.

Enhancing Law Enforcement Training Capabilities

The Freedom First Budget includes \$6 million for the Department of Management Services to complete a study and design of a comprehensive state law enforcement training facility for use by both state and local law enforcement agencies. Providing training and resources for our officers will further enhance public safety and response.

Expanding Access to Mental Health Services

The Freedom First Budget includes an additional \$200,000 to expand the State Group Health Insurance's employee assistance program to provide mental health services to dependents at no cost to the employee.

Modernizing Florida's Business Processes

Florida continues to invest in modernizing processes to provide enhanced government service. The Freedom First Budget includes \$2 million in the Florida Digital Service to continue to automate state functions through Robotic Process Automation, which will reduce processing and wait times for claims and application review for services that many Floridians depend on.

Safeguarding Florida against Cybersecurity Threats

The Freedom First Budget continues to prioritize the strengthening of Florida's cybersecurity framework through the investment of \$50.6 million in various state agencies for security intelligence, modernization and resiliency. As cybersecurity threats continue to become more sophisticated, it is vital that Florida has the tools necessary to protect critical state resources and sensitive information.

Enabling a Crypto-Friendly Florida

- \$250,000 to support a Blockchain Title Pilot Program within the Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles. The purpose of the pilot program is to evaluate

potential concepts, designs, and technologies to maintain and make available certificates of motor vehicle title through blockchain technology, and to determine the feasibility of providing to the public a permanent option to obtain or transfer certificates of title using blockchain technology.

- \$250,000 for Florida's Agency for Health Care Administration to implement a pilot project using blockchain technology to authenticate Medicaid transactions and identify potential Medicaid fraud.
- \$200,000 for the Department of Financial Services to offer Florida corporations the ability to pay state fees via cryptocurrency directly to the Department of State. Florida encourages cryptocurrency as a means of commerce and furthering Florida's attractiveness to businesses and economic growth.

Protecting Florida's Gaming Initiatives and Agreements

The Freedom First Budget includes \$26 million to fully fund the new Florida Gaming Control Commission to ensure the fair and effective regulation of gaming activities in Florida which includes oversight responsibilities of gaming compacts, slot machines, cardrooms and pari-mutuel wagering.