



MONROE COUNTY STATE LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

2025

MONROE COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Mayor James K. Scholl, District 3
Mayor *Pro Tem* Michelle Lincoln, District 2
Commissioner Craig Cates, District 1
Commissioner David Rice, District 4
Commissioner Holly Merrill Raschein, District 5

OFFICE OF LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS

DECEMBER 2024

KEY LEGISLATIVE DATES

2025 Legislative Session Dates:

- November: Swearing in of House Speaker Danny Perez and Senate President Albritton.
- December 2/Dec 9: First committee weeks for House and Senate
- December 11: Approval of Monroe County's Legislative Agenda
- December/January TBD: Local Delegation Meeting
- January 13-17, 21-24, Feb 3-7, 10-14, 17-21: Committee Weeks for House and Senate
- January/February: Bill drafting and filing deadlines, and appropriations requests due
- March 4: First Day of Regular Session
- March 13: Keys Day
- March 19: FAC Legislative Day
- April 22: Last day for scheduled committee meetings
- May 2: Last Day of Regular Session

LEGISLATIVE TEAM

- **House District 120: Representative Jim Mooney**
- **Senate District 39: Senator Ana Maria Rodriguez**
- **Lobby team:**
 - Robert Reyes of Capital Group
 - Frank Bernardino and Edgar Fernandez of Anfield Consulting
 - Dean Cannon and Ryan Matthews of Gray Robinson
 - Nick Iarossi and Andrew Ketchal of Capital City Consulting
 - Noah Valenstein of Brightwater Strategies Group
- **Associations:**
 - Florida Association of Counties
 - Small County Coalition
 - Climate Compact

LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

- Future development
- Water quality funding (Appropriation to fund Stewardship GRANT program)
- Land acquisition funding
- Affordable/accessible wind insurance
- Marine protection
- Affordable housing initiatives
- Flooding Mitigation/Road Elevation (State funding for Resilient Florida GRANT program)
- Roads and Bridges
- Home rule and local authority (Vacation Rentals and Local Occupational Licensing)

FUTURE DEVELOPMENT (ALLOCATIONS)

Future Development in the Florida Keys/Additional Allocations

Monroe County has been carefully currently evaluating a request for additional permit allocations, pursuant to the State's December 2023 Modeling Report.

Given the Florida Keys' designation as an Area of Critical State Concern (ACSC), Monroe County works partner closely with Florida Commerce (formerly Department of Economic Opportunity), the State's ACSC oversight agency on these matters.

- **Administrative Request:** Monroe is in discussion with Florida Commerce regarding 220 additional permits remaining within the 24-hr evacuation window.
- **Potential Legislation:** Direction to request additional permits beyond those 220 will require legislation to change to the statutory 24-hr evacuation timeframe. The Board will decide and give direction on additional allocations before we proceed.

WATER QUALITY FUNDING

- **Water Quality Project Funding:** Secure a \$20 million appropriation under the Florida Keys Stewardship Act to fund critical water quality initiatives, including the County's canal restoration program.
 - Starting this year, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) will oversee the distribution of these funds through a merit-based process. Local Keys governments can submit applications through a dedicated DEP portal for water quality project funding.
- **Fund Stewardship from State's Land Acquisition Trust Fund (LATF):** Continue to advocate for the inclusion of the Florida Keys Stewardship Act among the environmental initiatives funded from the State's Land Acquisition Trust Fund (LATF).
 - Funded by documentary stamp taxes via Amendment 1, the LATF supports critical state environmental priorities, such as Everglades and springs restoration. Adding the Stewardship Act to the LATF would elevate its importance and help secure annual funding.

LAND ACQUISITION FUNDING

Acquiring land in the Keys protects sensitive lands and reduces potential future takings liability (by retiring the development rights of parcels acquired.)

- Support the **Florida Forever Set-Aside \$5 million set-aside** in Florida Forever funding, authorized under the Florida Keys Stewardship Act.
 - **Progress and local commitment to date:** Since July 1, 2016, through September 30, 2024, Monroe County (the Board of County Commissioners and the Land Authority) has expended a total of \$40.6 M in local funds. The State has expended \$24M. During this period, 556 development rights have been retired (372 by the County, 162 by DEP, and 22 by the State).
- Support **extension of the authorization** of this set-aside, which is due to expire in 2026 for another 10 years.
- Support robust state funding of **the Florida Forever Program**.
- Support **additional state programs**, initiatives, and funding that facilitate land acquisition.

For Example: Voluntary Home Buyout Program (VHBP): This is a land acquisition designed to help reduce the impact of future disasters in high-risk flood areas. Monroe County was allocated \$15M which it is using to purchase the property and home of voluntary sellers who were impacted by Hurricane Irma. After buyout, the homes are demolished and the land is preserved in perpetuity for open space (or, when deemed necessary the land may be used for recreational or stormwater purposes.

- **Progress to date:** In total 21 eligible applicants sold their parcels to the County through VHBP. The acquisitions expended just over \$12.4 million of the \$15 million grant with the remaining monies being used for surveys, appraisals, demolition, environmental reviews, title reviews, and grant administration. The 21 transactions have retired 22 development rights (21 market rate ROGO Exemptions and 1 Transferrable Development Right).

MARINE PROTECTION

Continue efforts to reduce vessel dereliction and enhance boater safety:

- Secure **state funding for new shoreside facility (~ \$4M)** for the new Boca Chica mooring field.

Mooring fields play a crucial role in encouraging responsible anchoring practices and reducing the risks associated with abandoned vessels, which can be dangerous for other boaters, environmentally hazardous, and costly to remove. To promote responsible anchoring and resource protection, Monroe County is developing additional mooring fields. *Additionally*, these new moorings are a requirement to enact the 90-day anchoring regulation.

- Secure legislation to **clearly define and classify migrant vessels**, allowing for expedited removal and to prevent further environmental damage.

Monroe has the highest number of migrant vessel landings in the State. Currently handled by the State, via an Executive Order of the Governor. Should the EO expire, the issue will revert to the County, under normal Derelict Vessel Removal rules/regs, which are not adequate to address the type vessels typically used for migrant crossings.

- Support continued state funding for and management Monroe's **Vessel Pump-Out Program**.

To date, the Mobile Vessel Pump-out Program has conducted over 200,000 pump outs, capturing over 2.7 million gallons of vessel sewage.

AFFORDABLE WIND INSURANCE

Most wind policies in Monroe County are with Citizens Property Insurance Company, the state's "insurer of last resort."

Efforts to keep wind insurance affordable and accessible for County residents include:

- Support **reinstating lower cap** on annual increases to premiums – return to 10% cap
- Support rolling back the **non-voluntary transfer** of policies from Citizens to higher-cost private companies ("take-outs"), and lower the rate increase allowed for take outs.
- Support maintaining current eligibility for Citizens coverage amid "**depopulation**" efforts (oppose increasing value eligibility, and try to lower it)
- Support rolling back requirement that Citizens policy holders carry **flood insurance** if they are not at risk for flooding (FEMA's Risk Rating 2.0 has increased the cost of flood insurance and eliminated its low-risk policies.)

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Support local and state measures to facilitate/promote affordable housing.

- **Ad Valorem Tax Relief:** Secure legislation to authorize local governments to grant ad valorem tax reductions for privately owned residential properties that are voluntarily rented at affordable rates, to incentivize long-term rentals over short-term or vacant properties.
- **Construction performance bonds exemption:** Secure legislation to enable Habitat for Humanity to forgo construction performance bonds for new affordable housing development on 99-year leased County properties, to lower affordable housing construction costs.
- Support robust state funding for **SHIP and SAIL** programs
- Support continued **Keys set-aside in TC**
- Continue to address **statewide policies** related to the proliferation of short-term rentals and high-cost property/wind insurance that affect housing affordability.
- Monitor state legislation that promotes/facilitates affordable housing development to ensure that it doesn't supersede Monroe County's comprehensive plan regulations (height, density, Rate of Growth Ordinance).

FUNDING FOR ROAD ELEVATION PROJECTS

- Continue to advocate for the funding of **Monroe's road elevation projects** submitted to the State's Resilient Florida Grant Program
- Support robust **state funding of RF program** for future projects.
- Support the reduction or elimination of the **50% match** requirement.

RF grants secured:

- \$3.9M RF grant for Twin Lakes Construction
- \$1M RF grant for Stillwright Point Design
- \$12.2 RF grant for Sands Subdivision Construction
- \$3.6M RF grant for Conch Key Design and Construction
- \$24.7M RF grant for Big Coppitt Design and Construction
- \$15.3M RF grant for Winston Waterways Design and Construction

Pending: \$20.5M for Stillwright Point Construction

ROADS AND BRIDGES

The Florida Keys is dependent upon safe, resilient, sustainable, and efficient access and travel along US 1. Traffic congestion and safety issues along this singular highway that connects the 112-mile-long chain of islands affects the health, safety, welfare, economic sustainability, and quality of life of residents, businesses, and visitors.

- Continued local coordination with FDOT regarding the inclusion of the **Commission's prioritized projects** in five-year work plan, and to expedite projects identified in FDOT's freight study.
- Continued local coordination with FDOT and FDEP for the Florida Keys' **Coastal Resilience Project** regarding the flood mitigation revetments on US 1.
- Support robust state funding for the **Small County Outreach Program (SCOP)**. This funding is for maintaining and improving existing local bridges and local roads.
- Support continued efforts to advance County requests for **funding from the local bridge set-aside program** (federal funds) for local bridge replacements.
- Support efforts to improve **bicycle safety**, including more robust laws addressing phone use during driving and support for improved and **expanded shared use paths** along US 1 and local roads.
- Support robust funding for **TAP program**, and advocate for an increase to the program's funding limit.

HOME RULE AND LOCAL AUTHORITY

Oppose state preemptions that limit local government authority.

- Monroe will continue to focus on and roll back current preemptions on vacation rental regulation, contractor licensing, and single use plastic bags.
- Monroe will monitor and oppose any new preemptions efforts affecting land development and environmental protection that would override its comprehensive plan and ROGO regulations.
- Sovereign immunity increases and county commissioner term limits likely this session.

Summary

- Policy bill (s):
 - Allocations (pending further discussion/direction), extension of the Keys set aside in FF, Habitat performance bond exemption, ad valorem tax reductions for private voluntary affordable rentals, migrant vessel definition, inclusion of Stewardship in state's Land Acquisition Trust Fund. (Jan/Feb)
- Appropriations requests:
 - Stewardship Act Water Quality \$20M
 - Funding for Pump out program \$650K
 - Funding for construction of mooring field shore side facility (~\$4M)
- Ongoing Advocacy:
 - Monroe's projects in grants portals; support for state funding for resilience, FF/land acquisition, affordable housing, and roads and bridges; oppose preemptions, continued advocacy with agencies on various staff level issues.



MONROE COUNTY STATE LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

2025

MONROE COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Mayor James K. Scholl, District 3
Mayor *Pro Tem* Michelle Lincoln, District 2
Commissioner Craig Cates, District 1
Commissioner David Rice, District 4
Commissioner Holly Merrill Raschein, District 5

OFFICE OF LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS

DECEMBER 2024