Legislative Update – 2020 Session

Going into the 2020 Session there was an unusual amount of optimism that reflected the fact that there were no recent hurricanes, or other traumatic events that so often have dominated the Legislative agenda in recent years. Florida’s economy was booming with record general revenue receipts. The Legislature convened with the primary goal of passing a balanced budget, on time, and heading back to their districts to campaign for reelection. And, as the Session headed toward the finish line the first two weeks of March, we all watched as Florida reported the first deaths from COVID-19. The Legislature immediately began to receive briefings on the potential impact from the virus and pivoted quickly to focus on measures that could be taken to protect Florida.

The shift in attention from general policy and budget issues to COVID-19 also meant that many bills that otherwise would have passed this Session were tabled and can be expected back next year. Among the bills that the AAF worked on this year included:

**Deregulation of Professions** - House Bill 1193, related to the deregulation of professions legislation. This was the second year in a row that the Governor had asked the Legislature to eliminate regulations where possible. The bill included proposed language from the ECLB, that: reduced the continuing education requirements for licenseholders from 14 hours to 7 hours during each biennium; provides license reciprocity for out-of-state licenseholders with at least 10 years of licensed experience; and requires that new hires as burglar alarm system agents must completed the required 14 hours of training within 90 days of employment. Subject to the Governor’s approval, the bill will take effect on July 1, 2020.

**Preempt Local Licensing** - Additionally, legislation was filed in the House (HB 3) and Senate (SB 1336) that would preempt all occupational licensing to the State and prohibit local jurisdictions from imposing local licensing restrictions. The House of Representatives has repeatedly attempted this bill to strip local government of imposing restrictions and fees on various occupations. However, the bill did allow local government to issue journeyman licenses to electrical and
alarm system trades. Although the bill passed the House, the Senate bill failed to move through all of its committees and the legislation died.

**Mobile Panic Alert System** - A bill that moved through the process (Senate Bill 70) in response to the Parkland tragedy, created “Alyssa’s Law” modifying the school safety statute to require each public school, including charter schools, beginning with the 2021-2022 school year, to implement a **mobile panic alert system**, known as “Alyssa’s Alert.” The system must be capable of connecting diverse emergency services technologies to ensure real-time coordination between multiple first responder agencies in a school security emergency.

For the 2020-2021 fiscal year and subject to legislative appropriation, the Department of Education, in consultation with the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Commission, the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, and the Division of Emergency Management is required to develop a competitive solicitation to contract for a mobile panic alert system that may be used by each school district. Subject to the Governor’s approval, the bill will become effective July 1, 2020.

There were dozens of other bills that the AAF actively monitored and engaged with legislators to raise concerns or offer guidance. In many cases, legislators mentioned the business or personal relationship that they have with you, their local alarm contractor, and how they appreciate your expertise and professionalism.

**Looking forward** – In the midst of the pandemic, the Legislature and Governor are looking at daily reports on the economic impact of COVID-19. The Governor has asked the Legislature to hold off on sending him the FY 20-21 Appropriations bill and most other bills until later. Economic impacts from February are expected the end of this month, but the more important impacts from March will not be received until late May. It is expected that the Governor and Legislature will likely convene in a Special Session to address the economic impacts on Florida’s budget once they have a better understanding of the federal dollars coming to Florida and a clearer picture of revenue collections.