



Florida Insights Review

Published May 2022

Executive Summary

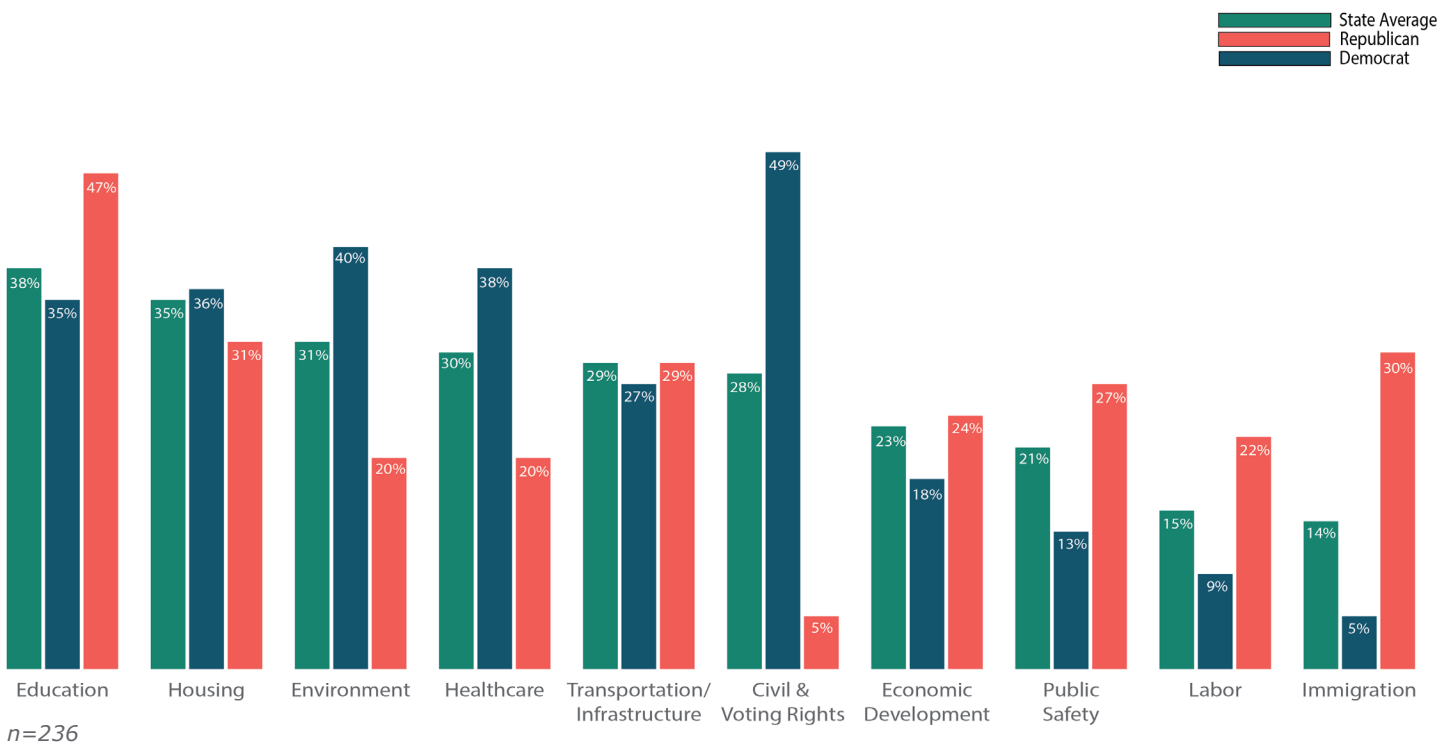
From June to October 2021, we surveyed and spoke with state and local policymakers in Florida to understand how the government and private sector responded to the COVID-19 pandemic and what policymakers want to see from advocates during this time.

This Review summarizes our findings on the top issues that have emerged, how the private sector has engaged with these issues throughout 2021, and what policymakers expect from the private sector moving forward.



Top Statewide Issues

"What do you view as the most pressing policy priorities in the state? Select up to three options?"



This review examines public-private cooperation on Florida's top policy priorities of **Housing, Education, and the Environment**, with a dive into public-private partnerships and advocacy best practices.



Education



Housing



Environment



Partnerships

Education

K-12 Education

46% of policymakers say resources should be allocated towards K through 12 education. In the past year, policymakers focused on returning to in-person instruction and expanding school choice while addressing problems with education funding and teacher retention.

Returning to In-Person Instruction

Closing the learning gap between pre-COVID learning and remote instruction is a major concern. Many policymakers see safely returning students to in-person learning as the top priority.



Legislature Wanted a Return to In-Person

"I heard a lot about COVID. And I heard specifically that they thought that there were not adequate safety measures and things like that for the students. The legislatures, including myself, thought that the students would be best served being back in school, rather than doing online learning."

-Legislative, R



Gap Between Pre-Covid and Present

"I think there was a major gap between pre-COVID and what they'll be going back into. So I think that review and maybe even an overlap of the previous year's instruction should kind of start off the new school year."

-Municipal, I



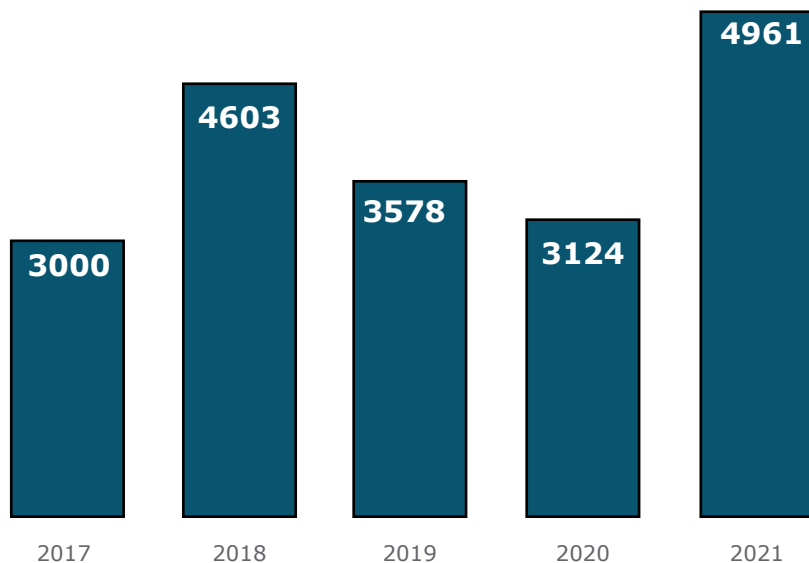
Health and Safety of Students is Top Concern

"There are a lot of parents out there who are very wary of sending their kids back to in-person learning in the middle of not just the pandemic but in the middle of an upswing in the state of Florida in a pandemic...I think that's the most pressing educational issue right now is the health and safety of the students, of the faculty, of the staff members, of everybody involved."

-Municipal, D

Teacher Retention

Teacher Vacancies at Beginning of School Year



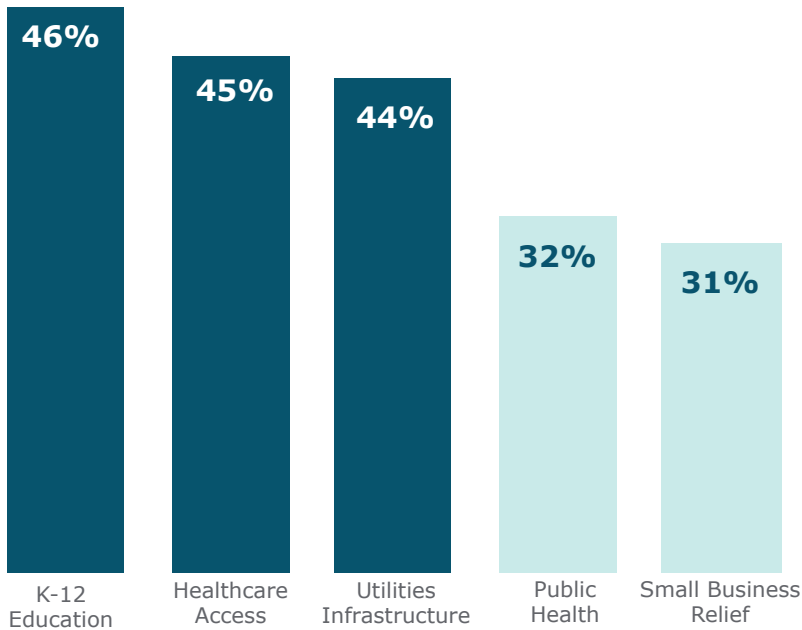
Source: Florida Department of Education

Teachers Need More Funding

"For K through 12 I would say the big, most pressing issue is teacher retention. They're not paid enough. So it's always an issue in getting sufficient funding to pay for teachers to give them raises and to prevent a really high turnover rate."

-Executive, I

Funding Education



Need to Fund All Aspects of Education

"I would have hoped to hear them stand up in strong support of public education. I hate to keep hitting this but...adequate funding to ensure that every child gets a good education and that they have the supplies they need, they have the food they need to eat, that they are taken care of in school, and not just passed through, because there are problems. "

-Executive, D

Where should state and local governments in Florida focus on allocating resources in 2021?
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Expanding School Choice

Policymakers see providing parents greater choice in where students attend school as a major policy priority.

It is the Main Legislative Education Policy Priority

"So the main bill this year would've been 1045, which was the expansion of the Family Empowerment Scholarship, and it's probably the largest expansion of School Choice in the country."

-Legislative, R

COVID-19 Accelerated School-Choice as a Priority

"But I also think the overall messaging on that issue was helped by the pandemic just because, sort of more than ever before, parents were having to struggle with whether or not they wanted to send their children back to a traditional classroom setting or if they wanted to pursue other options."

-Legislative, R

Housing



Housing

Policymakers of both parties emphasize the importance of affordable housing. Environmental-related concerns are secondary concerns to the lack of economically viable housing in the State.

A Top Constituent Concern

*“So I think some big policy concerns would definitely be directly what we’ve heard from constituents, so definitely some policy change with our practices of how we get out unemployment. **Affordable housing is definitely a big one.**”*

-Legislative, D

Ensuring Affordable Housing

*“So I think that’s the biggest thing in Florida because of our low lying position right next to the ocean. **The second thing is transportation/housing.** Is how do we get people to where they need to go in order to live their best lives? And that aspect of **living their best life is to be in the home that they want to be in or can be in.**”*

-Municipal, I

Economic Development Outpacing Housing

*“There is some grassroots support for employment, as well as for affordable housing. Right now, we are very blessed with our region here because we have a lot of jobs coming in. **But we are in a distressed area of affordable housing.**”*

-Legislative, R

Environment



Environmental Responsibility

Environmental concerns remain a key policy priority for Florida policymakers, especially Democrats. Policymakers want to leave a clean environment for future generations—supporting a transition to (i) renewable energy and (ii) building resilient infrastructure. There are also regional concerns, with Southern Florida policymakers prioritizing (iii) water quality and conservation.

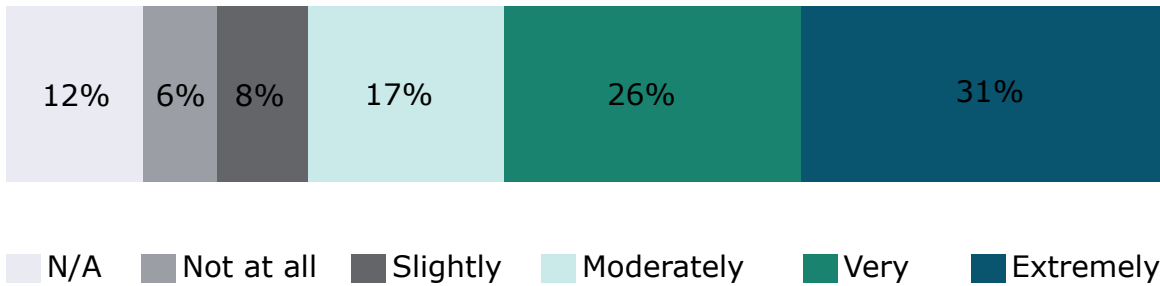
“We really have a problem and we need to figure out how to...quit making such a mess as we go and leave a better universe for our tomorrow, for the younger generation.”

-Executive, D

“I think it’s great. I think we need to focus, definitely, more on renewable energy, especially as we’re trying to build a resilient infrastructure.”

-Executive, I

As you think about the organizations that you respect the most, how important is their commitment to climate change efforts?



57%

of policymakers view commitments to climate-related issues as very to extremely important.

n=236

Industry is Recognizing Need for Renewables

“I mean alternative energy resources, I think they’re certainly worth looking at and pursuing. And I think in the future, we’re going to have a variety of different sources of energy and I think there’s going to be a combination of things. But I think that the industry’s approaching it. They’re looking towards the future, looking at alternative energy sources to supplement the power needs. I’m glad they’re looking into it.”

-Executive, I



Infrastructure Resiliency

Policymakers are concerned about combating rising sea levels and building the necessary infrastructure to handle a changing climate.



Rising Sea Level

*“They’re doing what they can, the reality is that **South Florida is in the crosshairs of global warming and rising sea levels.** Within 10 years, most of the south-- most of Miami will be underwater because of the ascension of sea level. This is our reality here in South Florida... **Every year the water rises an inch or two,** and it may not sound like much for one year, but in 50 years, that’s quite a bit.”*

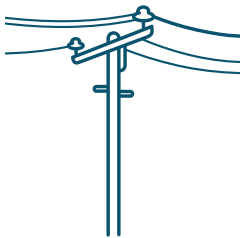
-Municipal, D



Upgrading Infrastructure to Handle Storms

*“There’s a huge amount of issues when we have a storm coming our way...But just knowing how vulnerable we are to losing power...sometimes you can lose power for several hours. **Upgrading our electrical infrastructure to put it underground. That costs way too much money. But I think something like that would be just a great thing** to get to see in the future without a hurricane having to decimate us first.”*

-Executive, D



Increasing the Resilience for the Grid

*“...I think resiliency, especially as we’re facing a rising population, climate change, hurricanes, sea-level rise, and **being able to be resilient and support the grid** when other parts of the grid go down...”*

-Executive, I

Renewable Energy

Policymakers support a shift towards renewable energy as a way to fight the climate crisis, viewing such a transition as a major concern for the utility industry. Affordability concerns remain, and policymakers want to see private-public partnerships to decrease the costs for consumers.



Affordability of Renewables Is a Concern

"I think it's great if you can afford it. So if you can afford to convert your house and do that, that'd be wonderful...But yeah, affordability is probably the biggest concern that I would have."

-Legislative, R



Utilities can Partner with Cities to Decrease Costs

"So I think it'd be great if our city and private utilities kind of joined in that, especially making it more accessible for consumers to have solar panels because then it also can be a monetary source for them because if they're making excess energy, they can actually sell it back to the utility company. I've seen that done before. So it could be not only a great thing for the environment but a great thing for the individual consumer."

-Legislative, D

Water Quality

South Florida has problems with water quality, with some places failing to have potable water. Water quality and its conservation is an important agenda item for policymakers, and they want to see funds allocated towards this priority.

Water Conservation is a Policy Priority

"I know, for Florida, from the political standpoint, there's a lot of interest in preserving the environment. Water quality is a huge issue in Florida...So from a policy perspective, at least, a higher level, water is a huge issue in Florida, and the quality of our water, because we get over 90% of our water from the aquifer. And there's been stress due to development. It has global warming changes and its impact on the coastal areas."

-Executive, I

Some Areas Have Non-Potable Water

"It's the same one that it's always been, is the quality of water. For example, West Palm Beach to the north...They are under a non-use notice. You can not use or consume any of their potable water...That is the aspect of climate change and population growth that is affecting us, that we need to find ways to fund these future needs before they're here because if we try to do it when they're here, it will be too late and we will have environmental issues."

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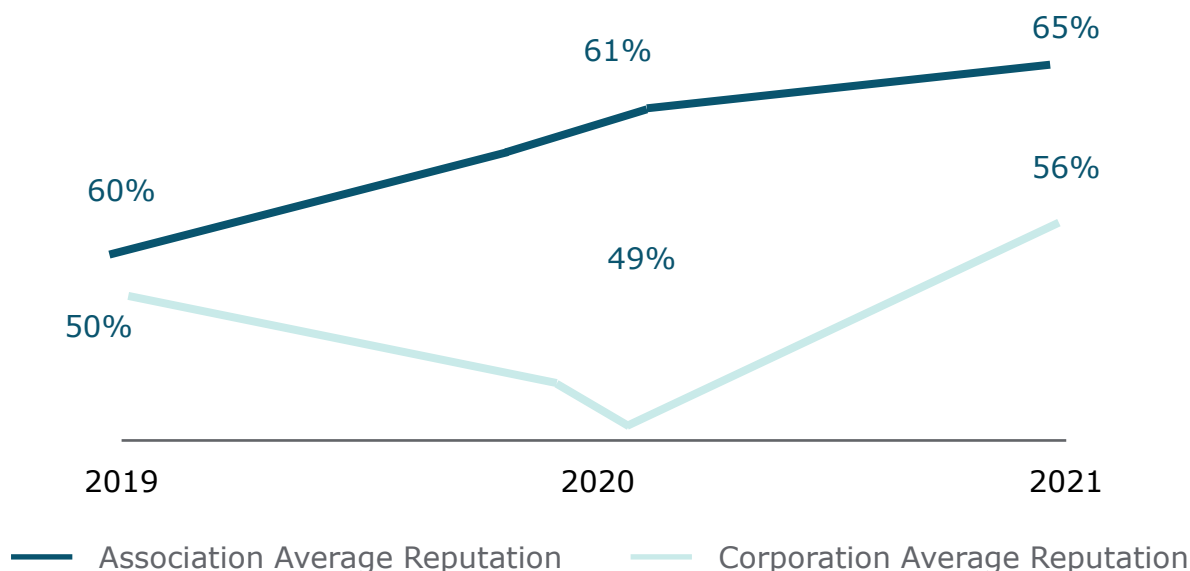
Public-Private Partnerships

Policymakers' Views of the Private Sector



Despite the social and economic challenges that COVID-19 has presented, policymakers in Florida have maintained a relatively positive view of private organizations. The average reputation score (Policy Brand Index) of both corporations and associations have significantly improved since 2019 and are stable since 2020.

Policymakers' Views of the Private Sector



Being Present in the Community

"They're very present in the community. They have donated to the arts. They've donated to community events. So they're very out there. I think they're very good at that, actually."

-Mayor, R

Building Rapport with the Community

"I think they developed a good rapport with the community by doing things like building these displays where we have family come to visit..."

-Executive, D

Making Public Good the Top Priority

"The public good has to be above all else. A private entity either has to adhere to their stockholders or to the owner of the business, right, overall. So finding that balance is where we have a good partnership, right? It has to be a cost-benefit. Yeah, you might be bringing significant tax dollars to our coffers but if it's disrupting the quality of life to our community, I can't go for it. It doesn't make any sense."

-Municipal, D

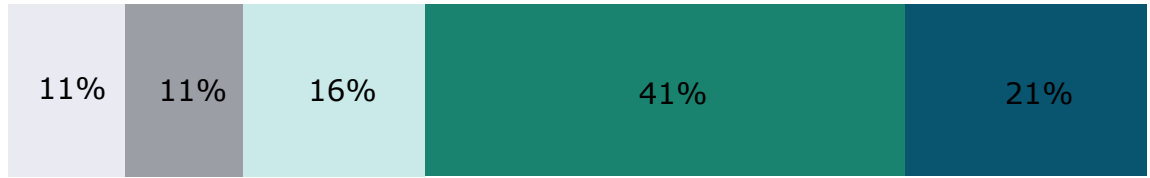
Private-Sector Response to COVID-19



62%

of policymakers say the private sector has been effective in tackling COVID-19 related issues

In your view, how effective has the response of the business sector been in tackling COVID-19 challenges?



n=237

Legend: N/A (lightest teal), Very Ineffective (grey), Somewhat Ineffective (light teal), Somewhat Effective (medium teal), Very Effective (darkest teal)

Business Stepped Up to Help the Community

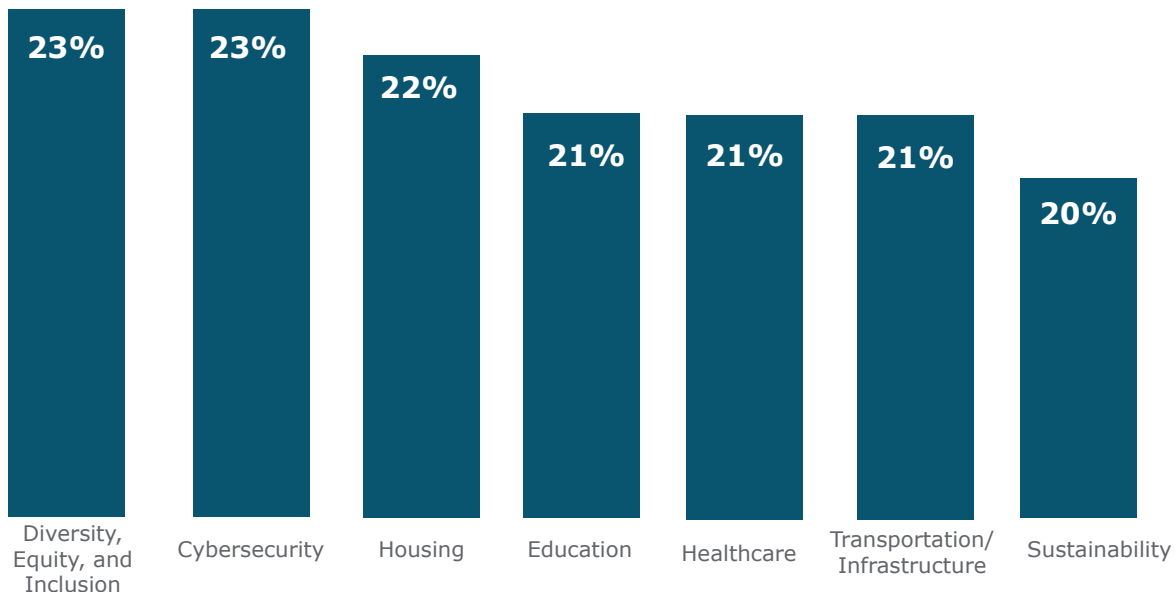
"I have to say, throughout Florida it was an unprecedented step up to the plate that I've never seen before in our community where there were people helping people, businesses helping businesses and people really looked out for one another and that to me just stood out above all else during this COVID pandemic."

-Municipal

Policymakers Encourage Collaboration on Key Issues

Moving forward, policymakers would like to see engagement with the following initiatives:

Aside from a COVID recovery, what other issues should the private sector prioritize in 2021?



n=307

Public-Private Partnerships are a Win-Win

"We want to reach the community so that they become healthy. This is why we partner with organizations in the community. I think it's a win-win relationship with the private sector."

-Executive

Advocacy & Best Practices: A Roadmap for Success



How advocates can be most helpful: foster professional, consistent, and proactive relationships with policymakers.

Bring Relevant Examples

“But it brought enough of a different perspective that it wasn’t completely repetitive. And one thing they did was they had people tell personal stories. And I thought that was extremely effective.”

-Legislative, D

Use Effective Mobilization Campaigns

“Writing mobilization campaigns are really important. And they really work in order to make some changes to the policy.”

-Legislative, R

Have Consistent Communication

“They called and emailed us about every single bill that they cared about. That’s the most important thing they could do because so many bills can move through the process that we can only be made aware of so many especially if they’re not hearing them in committee.”

-Legislative, D

Engage at a Leadership Level

“Engage more at a leadership level where they’re meeting directly with senators as opposed to having large constituent groups come to Tallahassee to advocate looking for another committee.”

-Legislative, R

About Ballast Research

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Ballast Research provides direct feedback from policymakers to government relations professionals, improving advocates' ability to understand, validate, and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of their engagement.



Our Promise

Confidentiality: All participation in our research is confidential and not for attribution.

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This deep-dive, customized research is invaluable for understanding what policymakers think of us and need from us. The insights are another important tool we use to inform our thinking on how to engage, and the data illuminates where we can do better.

-Head of US Communications, Fortune 10 Company

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1. Florida Department of Education. (n.d.). Retrieved February 14, 2022, from <https://www.fldoe.org/>

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Infrastructure Resiliency

Sea Level Rising

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-Commissioner, Municipal, D

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-Legislative Assistant, Legislative, Democrat

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-Legislative Analyst, Legislative, Republican

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-Manager, Executive, Independent

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