

Governor Ron DeSantis Highlights Administration's Major Accomplishments of 2020

Tallahassee, Fla. – Today, Governor Ron DeSantis highlighted the efforts his administration has taken on behalf of Floridians over the past year.

Governor Ron DeSantis said, “This has been a year of challenges, but it has also been a year of historic feats, innovation and resiliency. With record investments in education and the environment, continued funding for mental health and substance abuse initiatives, a seamless and successful election season, increased support for Florida’s military and veterans and more, 2020 was yet another successful year for our state.

“As we look toward 2021, I believe Floridians have reason to be optimistic. The vaccine has arrived in Florida and we have started vaccinating frontline health care workers, and we were the first state in the nation to begin vaccinating residents of long-term care facilities. As more vaccine supply becomes available, we will continue to prioritize Floridians most vulnerable to the virus to reduce the impacts of social isolation and support our state’s ongoing economic recovery.

“The First Lady and I would like to thank all Floridians for their hard work and perseverance during a year unlike any of us have ever experienced before. Rest assured, there is a light at the end of this tunnel.”

Putting Students, Families and Teachers First

- Historic Investments in Florida’s Education System:
 - Called for and secured the highest ever per-pupil spending totals at \$7,793 per student, an increase of more than \$137 per student over the previous year.
 - Secured the highest ever K-12 public school funding, with \$22.5 billion in state and local funding, including \$100 million for mental health initiatives.
 - Increased the Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten budget for a total of more than \$400 million.

- Pay Raises for Florida teachers:
 - Championed and secured \$500 million to raise the minimum teacher salary and provide raises for veteran teachers and other instructional personnel, boosting Florida to top five in the nation for starting teacher pay.
 - Maintained \$10 million in funding to support teacher bonuses and professional development in computer science.

- Expansion of school choice options for students:
 - Championed and signed legislation to increase the enrollment of the Family Empowerment Scholarship by nearly 30,000 students.
 - Secured an increase of \$42 million for a total of nearly \$190 million in funding for the Gardiner Scholarship, clearing the scholarship waitlist.
 - In October, Step Up for Students awarded their one millionth school choice scholarship since the organization's founding in 2001. During the 2019-20 school year, the Florida Department of Education, Step Up for Students, and AAA Scholarships collectively funded over 180,500 scholarships for students with special needs, students from low-middle income families, students who have endured bullying, and students who struggle with reading.

- Elimination of Common Core from Florida's classrooms and replaced with Florida's B.E.S.T. Standards (Benchmarks for Excellent Student Thinking).
 - The State Board of Education formally adopted Florida's B.E.S.T. Standards. They will be fully implemented by 2022.

- Flexibility for families and educators during the COVID-19 public health emergency:
 - Directed school districts throughout the state to provide parents with the option of in-person or remote learning for their children.
 - Extended the deadline for students to earn the minimum qualifying SAT or ACT score to obtain a Bright Futures scholarship.
 - Created an outreach and incentive-driven effort to reward childcare programs that remained open to support the families of Florida's first responders and health care workers, so they could continue to serve all Floridians.
 - Provided comprehensive distance learning resources in partnership with Florida Virtual School to ensure students continued learning while school campuses were closed and followed best practices for distance learning.
 - Provided more than 32,000 laptops to 34 small and rural school districts to quickly serve Florida's students as they transitioned to distance learning.

- Created the Florida Civics and Debate Initiative (FCDI), through a partnership between the Florida Department of Education and The Marcus Foundation, to elevate civic knowledge, civic skills and civic disposition for middle and high school students. The initiative, which includes a multiyear, \$5 million grant from The Marcus Foundation, promotes the expansion of middle and high school debate and speech programs to all of Florida's public school districts and support for high-quality teachers that are catalysts for students becoming great citizens who can preserve our constitutional republic for future generations.
 - Almost 700 students throughout 105 Florida schools have participated in 9 regional competitions. Additionally, 12 regional educators were named statewide ambassadors, and over 80 Florida educators have become coaches. Since the inception of FCDI, there has been an 83% average increase in participation in speech and debate in the South and Central Florida regions combined.
- Maintained Florida's higher education system standing in national rankings:
 - Florida was ranked by *U.S. News and World Report* as the top state in the nation for higher education for the third year in a row.
 - Three universities were ranked in the top 50 public universities by *U.S. News and World Report*: The University of Florida (6), Florida State University (19) and the University of South Florida (46).
- Endorsed and signed legislation allowing college student-athletes to be compensated for the use of their name, image and likeness.
- Successfully advocated for the return of college and high school sports throughout the state as well as activities such as youth sports leagues and summer camps.
- Secured \$180 million for the safe schools' component of the Florida Education Finance Program and over \$40 million in school hardening grants.
- Invested more than \$124 million for Florida's Historically Black Colleges and Universities to advance the academics, research and education of students.
- First Lady Casey DeSantis announced a partnership between the Florida Department of Education (FDOE) and the Florida Department of Children and Families to provide nearly 1,000 devices to Florida children in foster care who need a mobile technology device, such as a laptop or notebook, to help address the unique challenges to educational stability that these students confront.
- Maintained \$10 million in funding for the Florida Pathways to Career Opportunities Grant Program to establish or expand pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programs for high school and college students.

Protecting and Restoring Florida's Environmental Resources

- Secured over \$625 million for the protection of water resources for the second consecutive year. Totals included:
 - Over \$322 million for Everglades restoration
 - \$50 million for springs restoration
 - \$160 million for targeted water quality improvements
 - \$40 million for alternative water supply
 - \$25 million to combat harmful algal blooms and red tide
 - Over \$28 million in local water projects
- Directed the Department of Environmental Protection to purchase 20,000 acres of critical wetlands in the heart of the Everglades, protecting the lands from oil drilling.
- Successfully advocated for President Trump to include \$250 million for Everglades restoration in his 2021 budget request.
- Announced \$50 million for more than 20 statewide springs restoration projects to aid the recovery and provide additional protection for Florida's springs.
- Championed and signed legislation known as the "Clean Waterways Act" to minimize the impact of known sources of nutrient pollution, realign the State's resources to enhance the protection of Florida's environment and strengthen regulatory requirements.
- Championed and signed legislation increasing fines for sanitary sewer overflows by 100 percent, and all other fines for environmental crimes by at least 50 percent, to deter bad actors and ensure environmental investments are safeguarded.
- Announced additional plans to utilize Volkswagen Settlement dollars to add electric fast-charging stations along interstates across Florida to encourage electric mobility and reduce fuel emissions. Under the leadership of Governor DeSantis, and through efforts by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) and the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT), the state is adding approximately 66 fast-charging stations, providing 168 fast chargers to the state's existing publicly available inventory.
- Approved the acquisition of 15 Florida Forever parcels totaling more than 42,000 acres in conservation lands, to preserve Florida's natural treasures and lands for future generations of Floridians.

- Expedited and helped secure the required federal permit to begin work on the Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA) Reservoir Project 6,500-acre Stormwater Treatment Area. One of the most important Everglades restoration projects in history, the Project provides ecological benefits, reduces harmful discharges to the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee estuaries and sends more clean water south to the Everglades.
- Announced a \$20 million investment into the protection and preservation of Biscayne Bay, a joint funding initiative between the State of Florida and Miami-Dade County. The state of Florida and Miami-Dade County will each invest \$10 million, for a total of \$20 million, for important infrastructure updates and new technology to help predict and prevent sanitary sewer overflows into the bay.
- Announced more than \$5 million in grant funding for the South Florida Water Management District and Florida Atlantic University's Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute to protect and study water quality.

Supporting Floridians Through Mental Health & Substance Abuse Initiatives

- Announced \$23 million in funding to bolster Florida's mental health services system derived from the federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act to reinforce mental health support available in Florida and allow the Department of Children and Families to continue providing mental health and substance abuse treatment for Floridians in need. Of the \$23 million in funding, \$18 million was provided for Community Based Services by expanding the capacity of the Florida Assertive Community Teams (FACT), Community Action Teams (CAT) and the Family Intensive Treatment Teams (FIT) to serve an additional 300 adults and 375 youth with severe mental illness needing crisis intervention.
- Additionally, the Governor and First Lady announced that Florida is working with federal partners to set aside a portion of a previously announced \$4.9 million federal grant to be used for peer-to-peer counseling services for Florida's first responders through the state's 2-1-1 support system.
- Through her *Hope for Healing* campaign, First Lady Casey DeSantis made several funding announcements and spearheaded multiple initiatives to support Florida families, including:
 - \$2 million to 18 rural Florida school districts to increase students' access to mental health and student support services and to enhance access to school and community-based providers.
 - \$5.2 million for counties in Northwest Florida to support continuing efforts to expand telemental health services and rebuild early education facilities following Hurricane Michael.

- Nearly \$5 million to implement a Crisis Counseling Program to help Floridians respond to the behavioral health impacts of the COVID-19 public health emergency.
 - Nearly \$700,000 to extend Hurricane Michael crisis counseling services in Bay, Calhoun, Gulf, Holmes, Jackson and Washington counties.
 - \$2 million for a Preschool Development Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Grant to provide mental health sub-grants to enhance the skills of the early childhood workforce for improved classroom environments and individualized mental health services to children.
 - Launched “The Facts. Your Future.” statewide campaign which aims to provide Florida’s youth with the facts surrounding substance abuse and how it negatively impacts their lives.
 - Established the H.O.P.E. Innovators initiative, a statewide community-based team tasked with developing innovative ways to connect Florida students and parents with mental health information and resources.
 - Created Hope Ambassadors, a youth peer-to-peer student mentorship program that will recruit student volunteers to work with their peers and help create an environment of kindness and compassion in their schools.
- First Lady Casey DeSantis announced that the Florida Department of Children and Families awarded a \$1.2 million, three-year grant to Gadsden County for a new Criminal Justice Diversion Project.
 - This project will provide a comprehensive array of services and support for residents with untreated mental health and substance abuse challenges that too often trap them in the criminal justice system.
- Governor DeSantis and First Lady DeSantis announced that Florida has been awarded \$5 million to create a new pilot program, *Support to Communities: Fostering Opioid Recovery through Workforce Development*.
 - The program and funding will be used to provide wrap-around services, including recovery and support services, career training and employment services to participants directly impacted by the opioid epidemic.

Practicing Good Governance

- Made 61 judicial appointments across various courts throughout the state and expanded representation of historically underrepresented groups, including women and racial minorities, on the bench.
 - Of the newly appointed judges, nearly 40% are female and nearly 30% are minorities.

- Championed and signed Senate Bill 1326, the Department of Children and Families Accountability Act, which reinstates a system of accountability within Florida’s child welfare system and restores the department’s role in driving performance internally, as well as among all community-based care (CBC) lead agencies and managing entity providers.
 - The DCF Accountability Act established an Office of Quality Assurance within the department, responsible for developing and implementing a measurable grading scheme to monitor both internal programs and contracted vendors throughout state.
 - This legislation also encourages representatives from local churches and community organizations to engage in the state’s child welfare system and advise DCF on outreach efforts. With their extensive networks, grassroots perspective, and innate compassion, these individuals have an unparalleled ability to support initiatives like foster parent recruitment.
- Led the charge to initiate, and eventually sign, legislation removing the Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence from Florida Statutes following exposure of egregious corruption and spending practices.
 - The legislation allows the Department of Children and Families to administer all programs related to domestic violence services, restoring accountability in government for our most vulnerable residents and survivors of domestic violence.
- Announced that the Agency for Health Care Administration officially submitted its Section 804 Importation Proposal (SIP) to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services for Florida’s Canadian Prescription Drug Importation Program. This marked another milestone in Governor DeSantis’ pioneering efforts to lower the high cost of prescription drugs for Floridians.
- Recognized and participated in a virtual celebration of the 30th Anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Additionally, Governor DeSantis recognized July 24 as “Americans with Disabilities Act Awareness Day” with an official proclamation affirming Florida’s position as an accommodating state for more than three million individuals who live daily with some form of physical or mental disability, and our dedication to supporting individuals with unique abilities and their families as they work to achieve their dreams.

Fostering Economic Development & Prosperity

- Championed and signed “The Occupational Freedom and Opportunity Act,” which eliminates barriers of entry to certain professions licensed by the Florida Department of Business and Professional Regulation.

- Collaborated on the successful passage of legislation to establish a regulatory sandbox for FinTech companies in Florida to create an environment where companies that disrupt the status quo have regulatory flexibility to operate and provide new types of products and services.
- Secured \$145 million to fund workforce and affordable housing programs in the state of Florida budget for fiscal year 2020-2021.
- Spearheaded Florida's economic recovery following the worst financial impacts resulting from the COVID-19 public health emergency and affirmed Florida's commitment to protecting residents' right to earn a living and operate a business.
 - By September, Governor DeSantis issued Executive Order 20-244, moving all of Florida's 67 counties into the final "Phase 3" of economic recovery. The order provides that no COVID-19 emergency ordinance may prevent an individual from working or operating a business, giving Floridians and business owners needed certainty and the ability to provide for themselves and their families.
 - Thanks to these efforts, Florida has had seven consecutive months of month-over-month job growth. From May-November, Florida gained 721,500 private-sector jobs. Florida's unemployment rate for November 2020 was 6.4%, down from April's 13.8%.
- Secured \$40 million in federal funding through the U.S. Department of Labor Disaster Recovery Dislocated Worker Grant in response to COVID-19.
 - This funding is administered by the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity and provides disaster relief employment in the form of temporary jobs, employment and training services, and supportive services to eligible Floridians.
 - Individuals who qualify for disaster-relief employment include dislocated workers, workers who have been temporarily or permanently laid off as a result of COVID-19, self-employed individuals who have lost work due to COVID-19, and individuals who experience long-term unemployment.
- Signed legislation establishing an Office of Broadband in the Department of Economic Opportunity to support the development of more broadband capability in Florida's underserved areas.
- Collaborated with several private-sector companies and recruited them to relocate or expand their presence in Florida.
 - Scotlynn USA, a transportation and logistics company, opened a new U.S. headquarters in Fort Myers.
 - Synergy Technologies, a global IT consulting firm, will add 300 new jobs in downtown Jacksonville with a major expansion.

- Lloyd's of London, a London-based insurance market, expanded to Miami, as did Aberdeen Standard Investments.
 - SIMCOM International, a pilot and maintenance training firm, announced it would expand its Orlando footprint with a new \$109 million worldwide headquarters and training facility, creating 50 jobs over two years.
- Made multiple announcements regarding commercial aerospace companies relocating to Florida:
 - Announced that Made In Space will relocate their headquarters and satellite manufacturing operations from California to Florida.
 - Announced that Aerion Supersonic will construct a new state-of-the-art campus in Melbourne, Florida.
- Signed legislation giving Space Florida additional flexibility to provide financing for commercial space and aerospace projects to further bolster the state's capabilities.
- Participated in several launches from Kennedy Space Center on Florida's Space Coast:
 - The launch of SpaceX's Falcon 9 rocket, carrying NASA Astronauts Doug Hurley and Bob Behnken aboard the Crew Dragon spacecraft, the first crewed mission since the retirement of the Shuttle in 2011.
 - The launch of NASA's Perseverance Mars Rover, part of NASA's Mars Exploration Program, which will return critical information about the potential for life on the Red Planet.
- Successfully advocated for Florida to be named a finalist to host the U.S. Space Command.
- Signed legislation reauthorizing VISIT FLORIDA for three years and obtained \$50 million in funding for this fiscal year.
- Launched a new VISIT FLORIDA marketing campaign to encourage Floridians to travel within the state to help the tourism industry recover.
- Continued to foster a strong economic climate resulting in nearly 1,000 people moving to Florida every day.

Keeping Florida Moving

- Directed the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) to accelerate key construction projects as traffic slowed due to COVID-19, providing gainful

employment to Floridians and saving the state more than 650 calendar days of construction. These projects include:

- The Howard Frankland Bridge project in the Tampa Bay area.
 - The widening of Southern Boulevard (S.R. 80) in western Palm Beach County.
 - In Miami-Dade, the I-395/S.R. 836/I-95 Design-Build Project in coordination with the local expressway authority.
 - The project at Sand Lake Road (S.R. 482), near the heavy tourist area of International Drive and Universal Boulevard in Orlando.
 - Phase one of construction on the US-1 Cow Key Bridge in Monroe County.
 - The Diverging Diamond Interchange on S.R 200 (A1A) at I-95 in Nassau County, the first of its kind in Northeast Florida.
 - Five new I-4/S.R. 408 flyover ramps for the I-4 Ultimate Project in Orlando.
- Secured over \$9 billion for the State Transportation Work Program to implement and complete transportation infrastructure projects throughout the state, including:
 - \$2.5 billion for highway construction to include 101 new lane miles.
 - Over \$120 million in seaport infrastructure improvements.
 - \$400 million for aviation improvements, including \$85 million for spaceports.
 - \$885 million in rail and transit projects.
 - Over \$430 million to repair and replace bridges.
 - Improved safety through Operation STRIDE (Statewide Traffic and Railroad Initiative using Dynamic Envelopes), established by FDOT in December 2019 to prevent additional fatalities on or near rail crossings on state roads and state-owned land crossings.
 - Launched a Statewide Workforce Development Program to create career paths in the transportation construction industry.

Maintaining Florida's Fiscal Health & Safeguarding Taxpayer Dollars

- Secured over \$350 million in tax relief for Florida families, including property tax relief, a 3-day back-to-school sales tax holiday and a 7-day disaster preparedness holiday.
- Took decisive fiscal action to mitigate the financial effects of the COVID-19 public health emergency by vetoing \$1 billion of the state's fiscal year 2020-2021

budget and instituting agency budgetary holdbacks to ensure Florida's financial position remained strong.

- Maintained Florida's strong 'AAA' bond rating through fiscal conservancy amidst financial uncertainty from COVID-19.

Recovering from & Safeguarding Against Disasters

- Secured \$1.3 billion in federal and state funding for communities throughout the state to assist in their efforts to respond to, recover from and mitigate against major disasters and emergencies.
- Secured over \$730 million for federal Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recovery funds to be directed to the counties affected by recent hurricanes for recovery efforts.
- Relunched the Hurricane Michael Recovery Homebuyer Loan Program to provide \$10 million in down payment assistance to Floridians impacted by Hurricane Michael.
- Directed the Florida Division of Emergency Management to continue expediting hurricane recovery funds to support counties and communities impacted by hurricanes. As a result, Florida has distributed more than \$3.5 billion in hurricane recovery funds since January 2019, including \$2.6 billion in FEMA Public Assistance funding, which helps counties rebuild quicker after a disaster.
- Established an agreement with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to administer over \$380 million in grant funding for Florida's timber industry following the impact of Hurricane Michael.
- Secured approval from the Federal Emergency Management Agency for Individual Assistance for counties impacted by Hurricane Sally.
- Coordinated statewide response efforts for several storms during the record-breaking 2020 Atlantic Hurricane Season, including Hurricanes Isaias, Laura, Sally and Eta.
- Launched a "Know Your Zone, Know Your Home" campaign, including radio and television ads, to educate Floridians on hurricane safety during COVID-19.

Protecting Floridians Through the Rule of Law

- Proposed the “Combatting Violence, Disorder and Looting and Law Enforcement Protection Act,” which will create new criminal offenses and increase penalties for those who target law enforcement and participate in violent or disorderly assemblies.
- Devoted significant resources to support local law enforcement efforts, including 700 Florida National Guard soldiers and 1,300 sworn Florida Highway Patrol troopers, to protect Florida communities and businesses.
- Called for and signed legislation requiring government employers and businesses to use the “E-Verify” electronic verification system to ensure a safe and legal labor market in Florida.
- Implemented the Federal 287(g) Program between the Florida Department of Corrections and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement to enhance public safety and identify criminal illegal aliens received into correctional facilities.
- Created the Florida Foundation for Correctional Excellence (FFCE), a direct support organization designed to strengthen public and private partnerships to increase investment in re-entry programs and workforce training for inmates.
- Secured over \$2 million and 10 positions to implement the Statewide Behavioral Threat Assessment Strategy within the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE).

Ensuring Elections Security and Efficiency

- Partnered with local governments and Supervisors of Elections to successfully administer three statewide elections in 2020, including the general election.
 - Applied improvements from lessons learned and increased communication as a result of the Joint Election Security Initiative (JESI) between counties and the Department of State.
- Issued Executive Order 20-149 to address critical issues identified by Supervisors of Elections heading into the 2020 election season, including maximizing voter safety, increasing poll workers and increasing polling locations.
 - Secured \$10 million for state-level election oversight activities, with a focus on cybersecurity enhancements to Florida’s election system, including:
 - \$1.3 million used for ten positions dedicated to the cybersecurity section to provide Supervisors of Elections with support and recommendations to combat cyber-security threats.

- \$1 million available to Supervisors of Elections to continue cybersecurity initiatives and improvements to their systems.
- \$1.4 million for list maintenance services and voter outreach (ERIC).
- \$1.5 million for reimbursements to counties for the cost of special elections, pursuant to Section 100.102, Florida Statutes.
- \$1.3 million utilized to advertise constitutional amendments prior to the general election.
- \$3.5 million for election security grants.

Assisting Florida's Military and Veterans

- Continued to provide pro bono legal services to Florida's active duty service members through the Governor's Initiative on Lawyers Assisting Warriors (GI LAW) program, which has served more than 120 individuals to date.
- Participated in the "Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide Among Service Members, Veterans and their Families," a national call to action aimed at implementing suicide prevention best practices and policies.
- Secured nearly \$30 million in the state budget for Florida's military presence and families, including:
 - \$2 million for the Florida Defense Support Task Force.
 - \$6.2 million to rebuild the Panama City Armory due to Hurricane Michael destruction.
 - \$4.2 million to support Florida National Guardsmen and women seeking higher education degrees.
 - \$8.4 million to support scholarships for children and spouses of deceased or disabled veterans.
- Signed legislation creating a new specialty license plate with an annual use fee benefiting the non-profit Florida Veterans Foundation.
- FDVA joined the American Legion of Florida to create the COVID-19 Project Vet Relief Fund, which provides emergency assistance for veterans who are affected by the public health emergency.
- Launched Paychecks for Patriots hiring fairs in conjunction with the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity to connect veterans and military family members with hundreds of employers throughout the state.
- Secured \$2 million for *Veterans Florida* to meet the duties and responsibilities established by the legislature for the VETS Program, which includes career, workforce and entrepreneurship training.

- Signed legislation allowing veterans and service members on active duty to achieve their degrees quicker and without having to take redundant course requirements.
- Announced \$8 million for the “Salute Our Soldiers” Military Loan Program, providing down payment and closing cost assistance, coupled with low-interest rate first mortgages, for veterans and active-duty military personnel.
- Secured over \$20 million for the final stages of construction, inspections and recruitment of health care staff of the Ardie R. Copas State Veterans Nursing Home, and the Lake Baldwin Veterans Nursing Home.

Leadership During the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency

In 2020, Governor DeSantis has overseen the largest statewide emergency activation response in Florida history. During the public health emergency, the Governor protected our state’s most vulnerable residents and spearheaded a series of executive orders establishing common-sense, data-driven policies to ensure a thoughtful and targeted approach to mitigating the spread of COVID-19 in Florida.

By mobilizing all resources of state government, Governor DeSantis charged the Florida Division of Emergency Management, the Florida Department of Health and the Agency for Health Care Administration with an all-hands-on-deck approach to supporting Florida’s hospital system, 67 county health departments and to 4,000 long-term care facilities to mitigate the spread of the virus. These agencies worked with federal, private and non-profit partners to support the needs of Floridians.

Since the beginning of the public health emergency in Florida, Governor DeSantis has taken swift and decisive action to protect our state’s most vulnerable populations, including those over the age of 65, residents of long-term care facilities and individuals with underlying health conditions. The Governor’s early actions during the public health emergency saved thousands of lives and have inspired similar policies in other states and at the federal level.

Prioritizing Public Health Through Decisive Action

- Established a unified command structure through the Florida Division of Emergency Management to secure resources, such as Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and COVID-19 testing materials, to deploy statewide to protect Florida’s most vulnerable populations.

- Activated the Florida National Guard to support in various COVID-19 missions, including establishing and running Community Based Testing Sites across the state.
 - Florida Guardsmen assisted in the testing of nearly 2 million Floridians, both at testing sites and in long-term care facilities statewide.
 - At the height of the response in April, approximately 3,000 Florida Guardsmen were on duty for COVID-19 response operations.
 - Approximately 1,000 Guardsmen continue to provide support.
- Allowed for out-of-state medical personnel to practice in Florida and allowed pharmacists to issue emergency 30-day prescriptions.
- Worked with private labs and the state universities to expand Florida's capacity to process testing.
- Charged the Florida Department of Health with developing a dashboard to provide Floridians with daily reports regarding COVID-19 in Florida.
 - The dashboard includes current data, reports, recommendations, frequently asked questions and other information. This information is also available in Spanish and Haitian Creole languages.
 - Charged the Agency for Health care Administration with developing a data dashboard of current hospital bed availability to provide the public with greater visibility on hospital capacity and census.
 - This vital statewide resource is comprised of self-reported bed availability by all Florida hospitals. The dashboard provides critical, real-time information to better inform state and local planning and response to the need for more hospital beds.
 - The dashboard is supported with data from the Emergency Status System, where facilities enter emergency planning and response information and report situational awareness information during emergency events, such as hurricanes.
- Worked with the Florida Department of Health to issue a series of public service announcements reminding residents and visitors of the importance of following public health guidance to prevent the spread of COVID-19, including social distancing, hand washing and protecting the most vulnerable.
 - Developed and distributed over 200 different educational resources and public service announcements addressing COVID-19. These materials have been made available in Spanish and Haitian Creole languages.

- Provided over \$16 million in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) grant funding to county health departments to coordinate local preparedness activities.
- Supported County Health Departments in responding to questions about COVID-19, monitoring testing methods and identifying key local resources to support mobile teams for long-term care facilities.
- Partnered with regulated entities, stakeholders and the public to increase the availability of qualified medical personnel and facilities by expediting the application and licensure processes.
- Worked with the federal Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services to secure Florida's ability to be the first state to receive federal approval for a federal Section 1135 waiver to provide greater flexibility and reimbursement for hospitals providing inpatient services to long-term care residents.
 - In addition, Florida Medicaid implemented other flexibilities to ensure critical coverage and access to health care services, such as waiving co-pays and lifting key service limits, extending pharmacy refills and significantly expanding access to service through telehealth.
 - Deployed more than 2,500 nurses to hospitals and clinics throughout the state to supplement health care staffing.
 - Collaborated with public and private sector partners to ensure testing was accessible to all Floridians during the COVID-19 public health emergency. With all testing partners, including testing site, long-term care, and private sector, over 13,100,000 tests have been conducted in Florida.
 - At the peak of the COVID-19 response, the Division of Emergency Management operated more than 85 state-supported COVID-19 testing sites statewide. These sites have conducted more than 2.8 million tests to date.
 - Worked with the White House and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to secure millions of portable Abbott BinaxNow 15-minute rapid tests.
 - The Division of Emergency Management has received **6,276,000** rapid tests to date from HHS. These tests are also being sent to state-supported testing sites, long-term care facilities and senior living communities daily to ensure all Floridians have access to this critical resource.
 - The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services also shipped BinaxNow rapid tests directly to over 800 long-term care facilities throughout the state.

- Set aside an additional 500,000 rapid tests for Florida's long-term care facilities in November.
 - Delivered PPE to health care workers and first responders statewide. To date, the state of Florida has delivered:
 - More than 78 million masks
 - More than 23 million gloves
 - More than 6.6 million gowns
 - More than 2 million face shields
 - More than 1.2 million shoe covers
 - More than 112,000 goggles
 - Nearly 80,000 coveralls
 - Directed the Agency for Persons with Disabilities to distribute PPE to protect vulnerable residents and staff at APD-operated facilities including, 66,155 gowns, 264,620 surgical masks, and over 220,000 cloth face covers to 13,231 group home residents, thousands of providers, APD-operated facility staff and independent living customers around the state.
 - Procured and distributed Personal Protective Equipment for officers, staff and inmates at Florida's correctional institutions and probation offices, acquiring more than 250,000 N95 masks, 2.5 million surgical masks, 430,000 boxes of gloves, 5,000 pairs of eye protection, more than 50,000 units of gowns and overalls, 60,000 testing kits and 6,000 gallons of hand sanitizer.
 - Introduced self-swab tests to state-supported COVID-19 testing sites and prioritized testing for symptomatic individuals, individuals 65 and older and children under the age of 18.

Protecting Florida's Most Vulnerable & Spearheading Florida's Vaccine Distribution Plan

- During the height of the public health emergency, directed the Florida Division of Emergency Management and the Agency for Health Care Administration to issue an Emergency Order restricting visitation and requiring comprehensive screenings of staff and visitors at long-term care facilities.

- The Governor directed the Division of Emergency Management to secure testing every two weeks for the over 200,000 members of staff of long-term care facilities, resulting in a first-of-its-kind testing mission that was also the largest and most complex in the entire nation.

- The agencies ordered facilities to require staff to implement universal use of face masks while in the facility and wearing gloves when providing direct care to a patient or resident.

- Deployed Florida National Guard and Florida Department of Health Strike Teams to nursing homes and assisted living facilities to mitigate long-term care facility outbreaks by proactively testing staff and residents and launched Florida's mobile testing lab, which allowed Florida to exponentially increase these proactive testing efforts.
- Established 23 COVID-19 dedicated nursing facilities across the state to support long-term care providers, help with hospital decompression and protect long-term care patients during the COVID-19 public health emergency.
- Required hospitals to test all individuals discharged to long-term care facilities and required these facilities to transfer COVID-19 positive residents if the facility is not equipped for appropriate care.
- Established telemedicine capabilities for certain services such as behavioral analysis, early intervention, therapy and medical services to ensure continuity of care for long-term care facility residents.
- Directed the Department of Elder Affairs to work with the Aging Network and the Aging and Disability Resource Centers to step up telephone reassurance calls and averaged more than 50,000 calls a month over a three-month period through both responsive and proactive calls to check on the unmet needs, well-being and safety of older residents.
- Ensured older individuals remaining at home continued to receive nutritious meals during the COVID-19 public health emergency. Through various partnerships, including with the Florida Department of Elder Affairs, the Florida Restaurant and Lodging Association, Florida's Area Agencies on Aging and community partnerships, nearly 15.5 million meals have been distributed to seniors statewide. This is an increase of more than 200% in meal services compared to the pre-COVID-19 pandemic.
- Launched the Florida SAFE Survey in August through the Department of Elder Affairs to help seniors during the COVID-19 public health emergency.

- By taking the survey, designed by BellAge, respondents discover how their behaviors affect their own health and the health of those around them.

- The survey is free and may be taken multiple times so a person can see how different actions may impact their risk factors and SAFE behavior scores.
- To date, over 12,000 individuals have visited www.FloridaSAFESurvey.com.
- Spearheaded Florida's COVID-19 vaccine distribution plan and worked with the federal government to secure therapeutic treatments for those most vulnerable to the virus:
 - Met with key federal officials involved in Operation Warp Speed including U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar; Operation Warp Speed Director for Supply, Production and Distribution Paul Ostrowski; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; Director Dr. Robert Redfield; HHS Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response Dr. Robert Kadlec and Director of the CDC Office of Public Health Preparedness and Response Dr. Stephen Redd.
 - Distributed 43,120 doses of lifesaving Remdisivir to Florida facilities between May 4 and June 29 in support of the COVID-19 response and coordinated the distribution of more than 3,800 doses of Bamlanivimab.
 - Secured over 3,000 doses of the Eli Lilly therapeutic treatment sent directly to Florida hospitals and spoke with hospital CEOs to ensure qualifying individuals had access.
 - Actively planned and prepared for vaccine distribution, including purchasing necessary supplies. To date, Florida has purchased 5 million syringes, 5 million needles and 5 million alcohol swabs.
 - Worked with Florida's hospital systems who have the ability to store safe and effective vaccines that receive FDA approval to administer to qualifying individuals.
 - Prioritized residents of Florida's over 4,000 long-term care facilities and health care workers who are in high risk and high contact environments to be the first to receive the vaccine in Florida.
- As the vaccine supply increases in 2021, Florida will start getting it out to elderly residents as well as those who may have significant comorbidities.
- Mobilized EMS strike teams to supplement vaccination efforts by Operation Warp Speed partners CVS and Walgreens to vaccinate residents of Florida's long-term-care facilities. The Governor directed the Florida Division of Emergency Management, the Florida Department of Health and the Florida National Guard to partner on this effort.
- As a result, Florida was the first state in the nation to begin vaccinating staff and residents of long-term care facilities. As of December 22nd, strike teams visited 111 facilities in a six-day period.

- Thanks to the Governor's leadership, Walgreens began their mission to vaccinate staff at long-term care facilities three days ahead of schedule.
- Over 43,000 Floridians have received the vaccine since December 14th.

Assisting Floridians Financially Impacted by the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency

- Directed an all-hands-on-deck effort across multiple state agencies to assist the Department of Economic Opportunity in processing reemployment assistance claims, resulting in more than 2.1 million Floridians receiving more than \$19.5 billion to date.
 - In May, the Governor called for an Inspector General investigation into CONNECT, Florida's unemployment system, when increased traffic caused significant website delays.
- Directed the Department of Economic Opportunity and Department of Children and Families to waive work search requirements for reemployment assistance and Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Programs (SNAP) and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).
- Issued an executive order suspending evictions and foreclosures against those economically impacted by the COVID-19 public health emergency.
- Provided \$250 million in CARES Act funding for rental and mortgage assistance for Florida families that have been negatively impacted by the COVID-19 public health emergency.
- Secured \$40 million in federal funding through the U.S. Department of Labor Disaster Recovery Dislocated Worker Grant in response to COVID-19.
 - This funding is administered by the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity and provides disaster-relief employment in the form of temporary jobs, employment and training services, and supportive services to eligible Floridians.
- Directed the Department of Economic Opportunity and CareerSource Florida to partner on providing vitally needed workforce services during the public health emergency, resulting in the following to-date:
 - 2,984,878 services were provided by the CareerSource Florida Network virtually, over the phone, via email, by appointment and through Employ Florida to 1,080,369 individuals and employers.

- 43,067 job seekers secured employment through the CareerSource Florida Network.
- 7,826 new participants were enrolled in training through the CareerSource Florida Network.
- 435,897 business services were provided by the CareerSource Florida Network to 37,189 businesses.
- 150,242 jobs were posted on Employ Florida.

Supporting Mental Health During the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency

In addition to announcing \$23 million in funding to bolster Florida's mental health services system derived from the federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, Governor and First Lady DeSantis spearheaded a multi-agency effort across Florida to offer mental health and substance abuse support:

- Encouraged Floridians to take advantage of free national and local mental health resources, including the National Disaster Hotline through the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Disaster Distress Helpline, the Florida 211 network and the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline.
 - Recognizing the important role of health care workers, and the way that their mental health is impacted by their experiences, the Department of Health recommended the use of supportive mental health resources for frontline health care professionals, such as Talkspace, which donated free therapy for medical and healthcare workers and the Physician Support Line.
- Directed the Florida Division of Emergency Management, including Florida's Mental Health Coordinator Darcy Abbott, to support mental health statewide during COVID-19:
 - Coordinated with representatives from state agencies, non-profit organizations, treatment providers, health care associations, universities, faith-based organizations and other community partners to engage ongoing coordination and collaboration with mental health, emotional and spiritual care providers to support accurate information, messaging and access to ongoing support during the Covid-19 outbreak.
 - Generated and disseminated a directory of available local, state and national crisis counseling helplines, shared resources, training opportunities, identified areas of concern for mental health services and shared best practices.
 - Worked with DOH to identify resources for free of charge counseling services for health care providers in Florida.

- Collaborated with the Department of Children and Families, Office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health on the COVID-19 SAMHSA funded Disaster Crisis Counseling Grant application for Florida.
- Supported weekly conference calls for behavioral health providers and the Florida Behavioral Health Association with the Secretaries of the Department of Children and Families, AHCA and DOH through identifying agenda items and issues faced by these providers as they worked to serve Florida's communities and maintain standards of care.
- Worked with other states, as well as federal, state and local partners, to develop and share best practices on responding to mental health impacts of COVID-19.
- Directed the Department of Children and Families to initiate the following actions to support mental health during the COVID-19 public health emergency:
 - In alignment with the First Lady's *Hope for Healing Florida* initiative, which emphasizes the importance of telehealth as a service delivery method, Florida's managing entities reported a shift to telehealth from traditional face-to-face services. This resulted in a more than 3,000 percent increase in telehealth utilization.
 - In May 2020, SAMHSA awarded DCF a \$1.9 million emergency grant to address behavioral health disorders resulting from the COVID-19 public health emergency. The funding provides crisis intervention services, mental health and substance abuse treatment, and other related recovery supports for children and adults via telehealth technology.
 - A Crisis Counseling Program was established through a nearly \$5 million grant from SAMHSA in response to the public health emergency. The funding expands the capacity of Florida's network of 2-1-1 community helplines – a resource that the First Lady has championed – to provide brief crisis counseling services and make referrals for long-term treatment as needed.
- Directed the Department of Education to support school districts in their efforts to connect with students using virtual practices with school support services personnel, including school social workers, school counselors, school psychologists and school nurses and:
 - Hosted virtual webinars for district leaders, school nurses, school social workers, school counselors and school psychologists on how to better connect students and families with health care professionals and mental health services through web-based online platforms.

- Connected districts, schools and educators with professional development on strategies for providing virtual services for students.
- Collaborated with districts and schools on engaging local mental health providers and stakeholders to assist in providing services and support to families in need.
- Partnered with the Department of Children and Families to encourage districts to prominently display the DCF Child Abuse Hotline, 1-800-962-2873, to their virtual platforms so that students and families had easy access.
- Developed and disseminated a list of community resources for families and educators in support of student needs.
- Supported the Agency for Health Care Administration in waiving service limits and expanded coverage for Medicaid recipients to help ensure they could continue to receive their medically necessary behavioral health services without concern of their services ending because they reached a service limit or because they required a new prior authorization. The agency's Florida Medicaid program:
 - Waived service limits (frequency and duration) for all behavioral health services (including targeted case management services) covered under the Medicaid program.
 - Expanded coverage of behavioral health services provided via telemedicine to services including, but not limited to, mental health or substance abuse psychotherapy services, individual or family therapy services and medication-assisted treatment services.
 - Waived prior authorization requirements for all behavioral health services (including targeted case management services) covered under the Medicaid program.
 - Recognized social isolation for residents of nursing facilities and assisted living facilities needed to be addressed during the COVID-19 public health emergency. With facility visitors restricted to help prevent the spread of COVID-19, there was widespread concern that residents would become more at risk for depression and mental decline. In addition to offering Florida's Toll-Free Elder Helpline, the Florida Department of Elder Affairs (DOEA) worked to engage residents in thoughtful ways to keep individuals connected and hopeful:
 - **Project: VITAL for Long-Term Care Residents:** Project: VITAL is a partnership with the Alzheimer's Association. The project supports the well-being of seniors, their families, and caregivers by allowing them to remain virtually engaged and connected through specially created tablets designed to access resources like music, books, games, and the ability to video chat and email with family outside. It also facilitates educational and support opportunities for staff through a video-based learning platform and offers opportunities for virtual and online education and support for families and caregivers at home. During the initial pilot phase in April, 150 care communities were

identified and supplied two tablets per community, as well as virtual training on how to use the equipment and platform. To date, there are 600 tablets in 300 facilities and more than 20,000 interactions have taken place.

- **MP3 Players for Home-Bound Seniors:** In partnership with the Florida Alzheimer's Association, DOEA delivered over 1,000 pre-loaded MP3 players to socially isolated seniors and adults living with Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementia (ADRD).
- **Robotic Pets for Home-Bound Seniors:** DOEA delivered over 375 therapeutic robotic pets to socially isolated seniors and adults living with Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementias (ADRD). The interactive pets help combat social isolation and depression among older individuals and people living with ADRD by improving overall mood and quality of life. Robotic pets remain available through DOEA's online application and are available for any older adult. DOEA has distributed over 4,000 robotic pets within a six-month period.
- **The Talk It Out Mental Health Initiative:** Created mental health messaging through the Talk It Out Campaign and placed flyers in the bags of home-delivered meals. Social networking reiterated the fact that depression is not a normal part of growing older and listed numerous resources at #TalkItOutFL. Most recently, over 32 Talk It Out billboards have gone up throughout the state.
 - Collaborated with the Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs (FDVA) to share several resources with veterans in crisis, including the Veterans Crisis Line (www.VeteransCrisisLine.net) and the *Florida Veterans Support Line* at 1-844-MyFLVet (693-5838).
- FDVA also shared resources made available through the Crisis Center of Tampa Bay (<https://www.crisiscenter.com/>) and the VA COVID Coach app which was created to support self-care and overall mental health during the coronavirus (COVID-19) public health emergency: https://www.ptsd.va.gov/appvid/mobile/COVID_coach_app.asp.

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About Governor Ron DeSantis

Ron DeSantis is the 46th Governor of the State of Florida. Since taking office in January 2019, he has worked hard to expand education opportunities, improve Florida's water resources and the Everglades, champion vocational training, bolster public safety, foster innovation in health care, assist with hurricane recovery, promote infrastructure development and support veterans – all while lowering taxes and being fiscally responsible. Governor DeSantis is married to First Lady Casey DeSantis, a former Emmy Award winning television host who is actively working to address the impacts of mental health and substance abuse on Florida families. They are the proud parents of three children, Madison, Mason and Mamie. They are the youngest family living in the Florida Governor's Mansion in nearly fifty years.