

For Immediate Release

June 16, 2015

Contact: Katie Betta

(850) 487-5229

**Balanced Budget Prioritizes Education, Health Care, Tax Relief and Reserves
*Unprecedented Education Funding, \$450 Million to Mitigate Loss of LIP, \$400 Million in Tax Relief, Nearly \$3 Billion in Reserves***

Tallahassee, FL—Senate Bill 2500-A, Florida’s 2015-2016 balanced budget was transmitted electronically to lawmakers and posted online at 5:37 p.m. today, initiating the constitutionally required 72-hour cooling off period before a final vote, expected this Friday. Statements from Senate President Andy Gardiner (R-Orlando) and Senator Tom Lee (R-Brandon), Chair of the Senate Committee on Appropriations are below.

Statement from Senator Tom Lee, Chair of the Senate Committee on Appropriations:

“Our greatest challenge in crafting a balanced budget was to account for the phasing out of the federal Low Income Pool (LIP) program absent a long-term strategy to address health care for the uninsured. This significant change to the way we fund health care services, provided through Medicaid and to the uninsured, required us to dedicate \$450 million in general revenue to help offset tremendous losses to our community and safety net hospitals, as well as our medical schools and teaching hospitals.

“The need to mitigate the loss of LIP, which will occur again next year as federal LIP authorization is reduced by \$400 million, certainly limited our flexibility to address other budget priorities. Despite this setback, we worked diligently to present a final product that allocates an unprecedented level of funding for Florida’s K-12 education system, reduces the tax burden on Florida families and businesses by \$400 million, and sets aside nearly \$3 billion in reserves.”

Statement from Senate President Andy Gardiner:

“Our budget makes strategic investments in Florida’s future. We increased per student funding, doubled performance funding in our state university system and expanded the eligibility of Personal Learning Scholarship Accounts for students with unique abilities. We also created the Florida Postsecondary Comprehensive Transition Program to enhance postsecondary options that help people with unique abilities achieve their educational and career goals. Together these important initiatives will expand the pathway to economic independence for all students across Florida.

“In 2014, the voters across Florida spoke loudly when they passed the Water and Land Conservation Amendment, giving the Legislature an opportunity to provide an even greater focus on Florida’s water and natural resources. This final budget includes \$55 million in land acquisition, \$50 million for springs, and \$81.8 million in Everglades restoration to preserve Florida’s natural environment for future generations.

“Additionally, this year, the Senate spent a considerable amount of time identifying and addressing the safety and security of our state correctional facilities. Included in our budget is funding for the maintenance and repair of deteriorating facilities, surveillance equipment, and reliable vehicles to transport prisoners. The tools and resources allocated in our budget will assist DOC in ensuring Florida’s prisons are secure and the public is safe.

“In addition to meaningful funding in these key areas, we passed a broad-based tax cut package that leaves money in the pockets of Floridians, furthers our low-tax, pro-business climate and cultivates an economic environment that promotes growth and prosperity.”

For more detailed information on the state budget, please visit www.FLSenate.gov.

###