



THE FLORIDA SENATE

Tallahassee, Florida 32399-1100

COMMITTEES:

Appropriations Subcommittee on Education, *Chair*
Appropriations
Education Pre-K - 12
Ethics and Elections
Health Policy
Higher Education
Rules

SENATOR DON GAETZ

1st District

January 22, 2016

Dr. John Armstrong, M.D.
Surgeon General
Department of Health
4052 Bald Cypress Way
Tallahassee, Florida 32399

Dear Dr. Armstrong,

Thank you for your service to our state, our country and the medical community throughout a distinguished career. I appreciate very much your willingness to give guidance to the Senate about public health issues and health care policy, in general.

Prior to your confirmation hearings, I'm requesting that you provide some specific information to me that will help me and other senators understand the direction of public health policy in our state and the priorities of the Department of Health under your leadership.

1. The Department of Health relies on a variety of federal grants in order to carry out its mission. Please share with me the amount of federal funds the Department has reverted or returned to the federal government, if any, since 2012. Which funding categories and specific programs accounted for these reversions or returns?
2. The Governor's budget recommendations for the coming year include proposed reductions of 718 FTE's in the Department of Health. According to the EOG FAQ on the budget, two thirds of the proposed staff reductions are vacant positions which would not impact daily DOH operations. Please specify where these positions are – in Tallahassee at the departmental level or in county health departments – and what functions they perform. Are any of them clinical positions? On the surface, it seems as if two thirds of 718 FTE is a large number of what some may call 'phantom positions.' Is this an unusually high number for the Department?

REPLY TO:

- 4300 Legendary Drive, Suite 230, Destin, FL 32541 (850) 897-5747 FAX: (888) 263-2259
- 420 Senate Office Building, 404 South Monroe Street, Tallahassee, FL 32399-1100 (850) 487-5001
- 5230 West U.S. Highway 98, Administration Building, 2nd Floor, Panama City, FL 32401 (850) 747-5856

Senate's Website: www.flsenate.gov

ANDY GARDINER
President of the Senate

GARRETT RICHTER
President Pro Tempore

3. My understanding is that since 2012 there has been a reduction of approximately two thousand full-time positions within the Department of Health. Of those positions, how many were vacant for six months or more at the time they were eliminated and how many were actually occupied or for which there were efforts under way to recruit employees? If 2,000 is the correct number of positions eliminated, how many were employees of county health departments who were actually delivering or administering care?
4. Last year the Governor vetoed \$9 million for free and charitable clinics. Did you concur in this veto? I agree with the Governor that the best way for uninsured persons to get health coverage is to get a good job. Even with the Governor's extraordinary success in promoting a million private sector jobs, there are still large numbers of persons looking for work or training for jobs and, at present, are without health coverage. What is the appropriate source of primary care for these individuals who otherwise have to rely upon either the county health departments or free/charitable clinics?
5. My understanding is that DOH maintains accurate and extensive records showing the number of visits by patients, year by year, to all 67 county health departments. Please provide me with data that would show the trend line as to more or fewer visits and more or fewer services provided.
6. My understanding is that the incidence of sexually transmitted diseases is increasing year over year in Florida and that some categories of STD's have increased in incidence by as much as 40 percent within the past three years. I am also told that Florida now leads the nation in new cases of AIDS. Could you please confirm or clarify these understandings?
7. You have clearly and persuasively articulated your goal of reducing childhood and adult obesity as a way of improving the general health of Floridians. Is there data available that shows the positive impact of your efforts, to date, with respect to this important wellness issue?

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Again, Dr. Armstrong, I'm grateful for your offer to help legislators better understand the priorities, policies, decisions and results associated with the Department under your leadership. If there is any aspect to my requests for information that I can clarify, please don't hesitate to contact me.

With best wishes,

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Don Gaetz", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Senator Don Gaetz