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FHSAA dodges legislative bullet as bills die on final day

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Fri. May 3, 2013 | **Matt Baker** | [Email](#)

When the state's legislative session ended Friday, few groups were happier than the Florida High School Athletic Association.

Two bills critical of the FHSAA died after the Senate failed to vote on either controversial proposal before the close of the Legislature's final day.

One proposal — House Bill 1279 — passed through the House 89-26 two weeks ago and was sent to the Senate. The Senate education committee passed its version — SB 1164 — in a 5-2 vote last month then the legislation stalled.

The bills would have drastically altered the finances, structure and functions of the FHSAA, the private, nonprofit organization that regulates high school sports in the state.

FHSAA critics said the legislation would have provided much-needed oversight to an organization with a seven-figure budget that affects children throughout the state. The FHSAA and its supporters feared the bills would have led to even greater free agency among high school athletes.

The 938-line HB 1279 and its weaker Senate companion, sponsored by Sen. Kelli Stargel, R-Lakeland, would have stripped the FHSAA of its authority to regulate transfers and given any remaining power to individual schools or districts. Both would have limited FHSAA investigations to 90 days and capped the commissioner's salary at what the governor makes.

HB 1279 aimed to make even more changes. The FHSAA's executive director would have to be confirmed by the Senate, and the board of directors would have grown from 16 members to 17.

That bill, written by Rep. Larry Metz, R-Yalaha, would have frozen the FHSAA's finances and restricted its operating expenses to 55 percent of its budget while mandating 30 percent fund student scholarships and 15 percent go toward safety programs. If the bill had become law, the FHSAA could have lost its designation as the state's governing body for high school sports in 2017.

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