

March 11, 2021

The Honorable Wilton Simpson, President
Florida Senate
409 The Capitol
404 S. Monroe Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1100

The Honorable Chris Sprowls, Speaker
Florida House of Representatives
420 The Capitol
402 S. Monroe Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1300

RE: Everglades Protection and Restoration Advocates Oppose HB 1/SB 484 “Combating Public Disorder”

Dear Senate President Simpson and House Speaker Sprowls:

As bi-partisan and nonpartisan advocates for the restoration of the Everglades, we write to ask that you reject HB 1/SB 484.

The Greater Everglades ecosystem is nearly as diverse as the groups that work to protect it. Its watershed includes over 2.5 million acres of federally protected lands and waters, including Everglades National Park, Biscayne National Park, Big Cypress National Preserve, and fourteen National Wildlife Refuges; 2,800 nautical miles of marine habitat at the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary; and environmentally and culturally significant Tribal Lands. In addition, the health of significant waterbodies like the Kissimmee River, Lake Okeechobee, Caloosahatchee River, St. Lucie River, Florida Bay, and Biscayne Bay are intrinsically linked to Everglades restoration.

We know, as advocates for the protection and restoration of the Greater Everglades ecosystem, that it is a key economic driver for Florida, a significant national resource and an international treasure. We also know that the Everglades delivers immeasurable ecological and economic benefits to Florida and helps define the iconic Florida lifestyle which includes hiking, bird and wildlife watching, boating, fishing, snorkeling, and diving.

We work in the public arena and engage decision makers regarding the Greater Everglades ecosystem through litigation, science, media, lobbying, marches, protests and rallies. We oppose HB 1/SB 484 because they would undermine our ability to use these valuable policy-changing tools, and because of their well-documented anti-justice origins.

The bills, if passed into law, would silence many of the voices of those fighting for the restoration of the Everglades ecosystem, which has ancestrally been guarded by the Miccosukee and Seminole and acts as an essential source of cultural and spiritual preservation for these and

other indigenous Nations' way of life in Florida, and eliminate tools we use as a community to ensure that the public is heard and that decision-makers respond to Everglades advocates. The right to demand action on Everglades restoration has allowed the progress we have made in the past and to lose that fundamental right would be catastrophic to the future of Everglades restoration.

Florida law already criminalizes violence, destruction of property, and seditious acts. HB 1/SB 484 overreach and are unconstitutionally vague. The effect, and cynical purpose, will be to unlawfully silence, punish, and criminalize all those seeking to use First Amendment rights to freedom of speech and assembly as tools for change.

Everglades restoration has been a unifying issue across party lines and across chambers in the state legislature. We are counting on the same bipartisan rejection of HB 1/SB 484, in the name of Everglades restoration.

Respectfully submitted,

Audubon Everglades

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Audubon of Southwest Florida

Dan VanNorman, Vice President

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Florida Conservation Voters

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Florida Keys Environmental Fund

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Florida Oceanographic Society

Mark Perry, Executive Director

Florida Rising

Joanne Perodin, Climate Justice Program Director

Friends of the Everglades

Eve Samples, Executive Director

Friends Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee

National Wildlife Refuge

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Izaak Walton League of America, Florida Keys Chapter

Michael F. Chenoweth, President

Lake Worth Waterkeeper

Reinaldo Diaz, President

League of Women Voters

Susan Calkins

Martin County Democratic Environmental Caucus

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Paola Ferreira, Executive Director

cc: Florida State Senate
Florida State House