

March 2, 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: Statewide Environmental Advocate Opposition to HB1/SB484**

Dear Senate President Simpson and House Speaker Sprowls:

Protecting the right to exercise free speech and peaceable assembly has always been a bi-partisan endeavor. The protection of our state's diverse habitats and watersheds has also been embraced and championed by both sides of the aisle. We, the undersigned thirty-five (35) organizations are committed to preserving both and are therefore opposed to the "Combating Public Disorder" bills ([HB1/SB484](#)).

We are so lucky to call Florida home. Florida has more first and second magnitude springs than anywhere else on earth, many of our beaches rank among the top in the world, Key Largo is known as the "Dive Capital of the World," Florida is known as the "Fishing Capital of the World," and the Everglades is a World Heritage site. Cherished places need protection.

The health of our communities and our local and state economies are intrinsically linked to the health of our natural resources. Conservation organizations like ours work to inform decision makers and drive policy regarding environmental issues in Florida and off our coasts. We use a variety of tools to carry out our respective missions to better Florida's environment, including litigation, science, media, lobbying, and various forms of assembly. Floridians rally, protest, march, sign wave, and gather in vigils to better Florida's environment. There is a rich history of public protest in the interest of protecting and restoring Florida's natural resources. Recent examples include rallies to support increased funding for conservation land acquisition -- where ranchers stood alongside environmentalists -- and rallies by Floridians for Solar Choice: an alliance of libertarians, Christian Coalition conservatives, liberal environmentalists, and Tea Party groups aimed at securing the future for solar power in the state.

These bills are not needed. Violence, destruction of property, and seditious acts are already prohibited by law. Furthermore, HB1/SB484 are overbroad and vague in defining an "unlawful assembly," opening nearly endless possibilities for abuse. These bills threaten

our First Amendment rights to freedom of speech and assembly as tools for change. They stand to worsen discriminatory treatment of protestors and stifle protected speech. HB1/SB484 would chill participation in protests because potential demonstrators would have to risk arrest and prosecution for “riot” just for being in the vicinity of others who might choose to perform unlawful acts.

This chilling effect may be exactly what the bill sponsors seek; grassroots mobilization can present inconvenience to decision makers. However, those precious natural resources we use to draw tourists to the state have been saved over and over again by these mobilizations. We urge you to reject these bills in the name of those who have acted to protect your favorite wild places and of those who will work to restore places imperiled today by pollution, misplaced development, and failed policy.

These bills are a disingenuous reaction to the movement for Black lives protests last year.<sup>1</sup> We support the right for all to assemble to demand change, to petition for the redress of grievances, and to work to secure that redress.

People travel from around the world to visit our springs, rivers, beaches, bays, forests, wetlands, parks, and preserves. We live and work here because we enjoy Florida’s natural environment. These bills would undermine our ability to achieve our shared conservation goals and as a result would put at risk our very way of life. We urge Senate President Wilton Simpson, House Speaker Chris Sprowls, and all members of the Florida Legislature to vote “no” on HB1/SB484, the “Combating Public Disorder” bills.

Sincerely,

**Bay and Reef Company**  
Captain Elizabeth Jolin

**Calusa Waterkeeper**  
John Cassani, Calusa Waterkeeper

**Center for Biological Diversity**  
Jaclyn Lopez, Florida Director

**Citizens for Sanity**  
Dam Rametta, Director

**Democratic Environmental Caucus of Florida (DECF)**  
Janelle J. Christensen, PhD, MPH, President

**Earth Action, Inc.**  
Mary Gutierrez, Director

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.flgov.com/2020/09/21/governor-ron-desantis-announces-the-combatting-violence-disorder-and-looting-and-law-enforcement-protection-act/>.

**Earthjustice**

Alisa Coe, Staff Attorney

**Environmental Confederation of Southwest Florida**

Becky Ayech, President

**Farmworker Association of Florida**

Eugenia Economos, Coordinator, Health and Safety Project Coordinator

**Florida Bay Forever**

Emma Haydocy, Executive Director

**Florida Springs Council**

Ryan Smart, Executive Director

**Florida Voices for Animals**

Diane Koon, Board of Directors

**Food & Water Watch**

Michelle Allen, Southern Region Deputy Director

**Friends of Arthur R Marshall Loxahatchee National Wildlife Reserve**

Ron Seifer, President

**Friends of the Everglades**

Eve Samples, Executive Director

**Greenpeace USA**

Folabi Olagbaju, Democracy Campaign Director

**Healthy Gulf**

Christian Wagley, Coastal Organizer

**Hillsborough County Democratic Environmental Caucus of FL**

Russell Conn, Chair

**Indivisible St. Johns**

Mary Lawrence, Founder

**League of Women Voters of Florida**

Patricia Brigham, President

**Martin County Democratic Environmental Caucus**

Carol Ann Leonard, Chair

**Miakka Community Club**  
Cathy Lewis, Vice President

**Miami Climate Alliance**  
Emily Gorman, Steering Committee Chair

**Mountain Lion Foundation**  
Denise Peterson, Western Region II Coordinator

**National Parks Conservation Association**  
Melissa E. Abdo, Ph.D., Regional Director, Sun Coast

**Nature Coast Conservation, Inc.**  
DeeVon Quirolo, President

**Progress Florida**  
Mark Ferrulo, Executive Director

**Okaloosa County Democratic Environmental Caucus of Florida**  
John Yost, Chair

**Rebah Farm**  
Carol Ahearn, Owner

**ReThink Energy Florida**  
Kim Ross, Executive Director

**Sierra Club**  
Cris Costello, Senior Organizing Manager

**Springs Eternal Project**  
Lesley Gamble and John Moran, Co-directors

**St. Johns County Chapter, Democratic Environmental Caucus of Florida**  
John Pilecki, Chair

**Stone Crab Alliance**  
Karen Dwyer, Ph.D., Co-founder

**Surfrider Foundation**  
Holly Parker Curry, Florida Policy Manager

cc: Florida State Senate  
Florida State House