



January 13, 2026

Via Email Delivery

The Honorable Wyman Duggan
Florida House
422 The Capitol
402 South Monroe Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1100

Re: HB 655 – Public Meetings/Attorney Meetings to Discuss Private Property Rights Claims
1.14.2026 Agenda, House Civil Justice & Claims Subcommittee

Dear Representative Duggan:

On behalf of the Florida League of Cities and the 411 cities, towns, and villages we represent, we strongly support HB 655 and thank you for filing this legislation to allow local governments with limited authority to hold shade meetings when discussing pending Bert Harris Private Property Rights Protection Act claims. Cities appreciate your attention to a narrow procedural issue that directly affects the statute's pre-suit resolution process, which too often has resulted in unnecessary litigation, higher legal costs, and delayed settlements for both local governments and property owners.

Under current law, when a property owner submits a claim under the Bert Harris Act, city officials have a 90-day period to review the claim and attempt to reach a resolution before litigation is filed. During this time, they are not permitted to meet privately with their legal counsel to discuss potential risks or settlement options. As a result, city commissions must either postpone a meaningful discussion until after a lawsuit is filed or deliberate on legal strategy in a public forum, which can compromise their negotiating position. This limitation makes it more difficult for both parties to achieve an early and practical resolution.

HB 655 provides a narrowly tailored procedural adjustment by authorizing local governments to apply the existing shade-meeting exemption to pre-suit Bert Harris Act claims, while maintaining every safeguard currently required under the Sunshine Law. The bill preserves public notice, limits attendance, requires a verbatim transcript by a certified court reporter, and mandates public disclosure upon settlement, conclusion of litigation, or expiration of the limitations period. It does not alter damages, settlement standards, or permit final decisions in private; all settlements and regulatory actions would still require a public vote.

By allowing confidential evaluation of legal exposure before litigation begins, HB 655 encourages earlier and more realistic settlement discussions. These discussions are often centered on regulatory or permitting adjustments rather than prolonged disputes. This approach reduces unnecessary litigation, lowers taxpayer costs, and benefits private property owners by increasing the likelihood of faster and more efficient resolutions.

Florida's cities strongly support HB 655 and appreciate your leadership in advancing a practical, transparent approach to resolving Bert Harris Act claims. We look forward to working with you as the bill moves through the committee process.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Matthew Singer'.

Matthew Singer
Legislative Advocate
Florida League of Cities, Inc.

cc: Chair Koster and Members of the House Civil Justice & Claims Subcommittee

