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Some lawmakers say the Surfside condo collapse should lead to stricter building standards. FILE

## Earlier building collapses prompted stricter standards

John Kennedy Capital Bureau | USA TODAY NETWORK

TALLAHASSEE – Two earlier building collapses in Florida led to stricter engineering and construction standards over the past decades, prompting some lawmakers to urge that a similar overhaul is demanded by the Surfside condominium tragedy.

Sen. Jason Pizzo, D-North Miami Beach, said he plans to file legislation that would likely focus on building requirements, reinspection standards for older buildings, the risk of seawater intrusion and the financial obligations of condominium associations.

“We should at least be looking at two things: The actual physical structure itself, the design and material used, and the accelerated environmental conditions that are affecting these buildings near the beach,” said Pizzo, whose district includes Surfside and 14 other Miami-Dade County cities, most of them filled with high-rise condos.

Florida lawmakers begin committee work in September, in advance of the 2022 legislative session that starts in January. While Pizzo’s ideas haven’t drawn much attention yet, Florida has a history of disaster followed by a response.

When the federal Drug Enforcement Agency’s building in downtown Miami collapsed in 1974, killing seven people, the almost 50-year-old building’s failure was blamed on an overloaded parking deck. But it led to a recertification inspection program for commercial and residential buildings more than 40 years old.

The program, however, only was used in Miami-Dade for decades until Broward County began such recertification inspections in 2006. The partially collapsed Champlain Towers South condominium had begun its 40-year recertification process when it fell last Thursday.

“We have to have recertification statewide, especially in coastal areas,” Pizzo said.

Another notable collapse, the five-story Harbor Cay condominium, which gave way during construction in 1981, killing 11 workers, was blamed on engineering and design flaws. That led to more expansive inspection requirements for Florida buildings three stories and taller.

The Harbor Cay collapse occurred the same year the Champlain Towers in Surfside were being built. On Tuesday, search teams continued to work through the debris as the death toll stood at 11, with 150 people still missing.

President Joe Biden and first lady Jill Biden are scheduled to visit the area on Thursday.

Rep. Joe Geller, D-Aventura, who also represents Surfside, said that it is likely that any effort to expand state building, engineering, or inspection requirements will face resistance – especially from a Republican-controlled Legislature that tends to side with industry on many issues.

Still, he pointed out that Floridians living in coastal condos across the state span party lines. Many, Geller said, have become nervous about the integrity of their own buildings and are looking for reassurance since the Surfside disaster.

“There will be resistance,” Geller said. “But if any-

thing is ever going to get done, it better be done now.”

So far, though, Gov. Ron DeSantis has taken a longer view of the disaster. He said it was important to review eventual findings by the National Institute of Standards and Technology, part of the U.S. Commerce Department, before recommending the next steps.

The federal agency, which has investigated four major deadly events in the past 20 years, including the 2001 collapse of the World Trade Center twin towers, has joined the structural review now being conducted by Surfside and Miami-Dade County officials.

“It is something that’s going to be very thorough and is something that is not going to happen in a day or two,” DeSantis said. “This is going to take a long time... we’ve pledged at the state, if they need support from engineers, from experts, whatever they need... we’re here to help.”

He added: “I think the people of Florida want to understand how could this happen and what could we do to make sure it does not happen again.”

Florida House Speaker Chris Sprowls, R-Palm Harbor, also said he wants to take a measured approach while awaiting more signs of possible causes for the tragedy.

“It would be premature to speculate or prejudge the situation,” Sprowls said. “We expect a comprehensive investigation will be conducted, and once we have those findings, the Florida House will consider what legislative actions are required and appropriate.”

### IN BRIEF

#### Silenced speech may see federal review

VOORHEES TOWNSHIP, N.J. – A New Jersey high school valedictorian was silenced briefly during commencement remarks about mental illness and his own experience as a queer-identifying teen surviving high school.

Now, the school district wants a federal agency to review whether it acted improperly in muting Bryce Dershem’s microphone and allegedly crumpling the paper copy of his speech on the dais before 450 graduates and their families.

Eastern Regional Camden County High School District Superintendent Robert Cloutier told the Courier-Post, part of the USA TODAY Network, on Monday that he has directed school district attorney Anthony Padovani “to contact an appropriate government agency to conduct an independent review.”

Padovani said he’s filed a complaint with the U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights in Cherry Hill, New Jersey, requesting the agency investigate whether the school district discriminated against Dershem.

“There is an act of discrimination that is now being alleged against us,” Padovani said. “We can’t really conduct our investigation ... let an independent see if we did anything wrong. That’s fair.”

### NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARINGS

The Martin County Local Planning Agency will conduct public hearings on July 15, 2021, beginning at 7:00 P.M., or as soon thereafter as the items may be heard, to review the following items:

1. **AN ORDINANCE OF MARTIN COUNTY, FLORIDA, AMENDING CHAPTER 5, ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES, CODE OF ORDINANCES, MARTIN COUNTY CODE, PROVIDING FOR APPLICABILITY, CONFLICTING PROVISIONS, SEVERABILITY, FILING WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE, CODIFICATION, AND AN EFFECTIVE DATE.**
2. **AN ORDINANCE OF MARTIN COUNTY, FLORIDA, AMENDING ARTICLE 3, ZONING DISTRICTS, LAND DEVELOPMENT REGULATIONS, MARTIN COUNTY CODE, TO PROVIDE FOR REVISED DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS AND SETBACKS, PROVIDING FOR APPLICABILITY, CONFLICTING PROVISIONS, SEVERABILITY, FILING WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE, CODIFICATION, AND AN EFFECTIVE DATE.**
3. **AN ORDINANCE OF MARTIN COUNTY, FLORIDA, AMENDING ARTICLE 3, ZONING DISTRICTS, TO REPEAL SECTION 3.260, COMMUNITY REDEVELOPMENT OVERLAY DISTRICTS, IN GENERAL, AND SECTION 3.266, INDIANTOWN REDEVELOPMENT OVERLAY DISTRICT, LAND DEVELOPMENT REGULATIONS, MARTIN COUNTY CODE, PROVIDING FOR APPLICABILITY, CONFLICTING PROVISIONS, SEVERABILITY, FILING WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE, CODIFICATION, AND AN EFFECTIVE DATE.**

All interested persons are invited to attend and be heard. The meeting will be held in the Commission Chambers on the first floor of the Martin County Administrative Center, 2401 S.E. Monterey Road, Stuart, Florida. Written comments may be mailed to: Paul Schilling, Director, Martin County Growth Management Department, 2401 S.E. Monterey Road, Stuart, Florida 34996. Copies of the items will be available from the Growth Management Department. For more information, contact the Growth Management Department at (772) 288-5495.

Persons with disabilities who need an accommodation in order to participate in this proceeding are entitled, at no cost, to the provision of certain assistance. This does not include transportation to and from the meeting. Please contact the Office of the ADA Coordinator at (772) 320-3131, or the Office of the County Administrator at (772) 288-5400, or in writing to 2401 SE Monterey Road, Stuart, FL, 34996, no later than three days before the hearing date. Persons using a TTY device, please call 711 Florida Relay Services.

If any person decides to appeal any decision made with respect to any matter considered at the meetings or hearings of any board, committee, agency, council, or advisory group, that person will need a record of the proceedings and, for such purpose, may need to ensure that a verbatim record of the proceedings is made, which record should include the testimony and evidence upon which the appeal is to be based.

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