

## STEVE BAHMER: LEGISLATURE MUST PROVIDE SUFFICIENT MONEY FOR HOUSING FOR SENIORS

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It's no secret that Florida has a high population of seniors. The quintessential Florida lifestyle has long been a favorite of retirees. But as we age, we encounter new expenses ranging from medical bills to unexpected home repairs, leaving many who are on fixed incomes at risk of losing their home or in search of affordable housing.

Fortunately, there are federal and state programs designed to help Florida's seniors maintain independence. Specifically, the Sadowski programs come to mind, since the Florida Legislature is heading toward budget negotiations.

In fact, affordable housing for older Floridians has been a mainstay of the Sadowski programs from the time they were created. The State Housing Initiatives Partnership (SHIP) program has allowed thousands of elderly homeowners to stay in their homes by providing money for emergency repairs and accessibility retrofits, while 10 percent of the funds for the State Apartment Incentive Loan (SAIL) program are set aside for rental developments that serve elderly households.

This is why we, at LeadingAge Florida, became a member of the Sadowski Housing Coalition, joining them in advocating for all housing trust fund monies to go toward Florida's affordable housing programs.

Thus, we are heartened by the Florida Senate's recommendation to direct all housing trust fund monies toward housing. We request they hold firm on their position and not waver during the budget negotiation process.

Unfortunately, the Florida House did not recommend the same funding levels. As such, we encourage House members to stand in support of affordable housing and adopt the Senate's funding position.

Affordable housing should be a priority for our state where, according to 2014 Census, nearly one in five Floridians is over the age of 65 and the elderly population is projected to grow. Almost without exception, LeadingAge Florida housing members have long and growing waiting lists of seniors in search of safe, affordable housing.

In many cases, those seniors can expect to wait a minimum of three to five years. When you take into consideration that between the 2006-07 and 2011-12 fiscal years, SHIP assisted more than 8,300 households headed by someone age 62 or older, the tremendous need cannot be denied.

At LeadingAge Florida, we aim to expand the possibilities for aging through advocating for affordable housing practices and policies, among others, that help Florida's seniors maintain their independence.

We hope both the Senate and House keep in mind the important role that affordable housing and independent living play in the lives of Florida's seniors and find common ground. And we encourage the Legislature to adopt a budget that ensures all housing trust fund monies go toward addressing Florida's housing crisis.

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Steve Bahmer is President/CEO of LeadingAge Florida, which is a member of the Sadowski Coalition. **Column courtesy of Context Florida.**