

# Orlando Sentinel

## Create jobs by restoring state funding for affordable housing: Where We Stand



Florida Gov. Rick Scott (Andrew Wardlow / AP)

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Gov. Rick Scott has been in a pitched political battle with Florida House Speaker Richard Corcoran over the fate of the state's economic development and tourism marketing agencies. Last week Scott said House members who voted to eliminate Enterprise Florida and Visit Florida "didn't care about jobs." Hasn't the governor heard the old warning about throwing stones from glass houses?

In the budget proposal Scott submitted to legislators in December, he called for diverting \$224 million from affordable housing trust funds to spend for other purposes. That's more than three-quarters of the \$292 million projected to flow into the funds next year under a 1992 law that reserves a share of documentary stamp taxes on real-estate transactions to invest in affordable housing.

If Scott left that money alone, it would be enough to create \$3.78 billion in positive economic impact for the state's economy and 28,700 jobs, according to the Sadowski Housing Coalition. The coalition includes groups representing business, local governments and churches, along with advocates for veterans, senior citizens, people with disabilities and the homeless.

Scott has routinely treated the affordable housing trust funds as a piggy bank for other spending, or to fill in budget gaps left by his tax-cut proposals. His latest budget calls for \$618 million in tax cuts, including a \$454 million break for businesses on the tax they owe on rent.

Just last year, Scott recommended diverting \$172 million from the affordable housing trust funds. Legislators only lessened the damage, reducing the raid on the trust funds to \$117 million in the final budget they sent to the governor.

This is a bad time to be diverting any dollars at all from affordable housing in Florida. A recent survey from the National Association of Realtors ranked Florida as the nation's sixth-least affordable housing market — a reflection of rising real-estate prices and rents amid lower-than-average wages in the Sunshine State.

A shortage of affordable housing in Central Florida led Orange County Mayor Teresa Jacobs to call a summit on the problem in October. In Orange, Lake, Osceola and Seminole counties, nearly 100,000 residents are spending more than 30 percent of their income on housing — a level that makes them “cost burdened,” according to the University of Florida's Shimberg Center for Housing Studies.

Speakers at Jacobs' summit stressed that housing was unaffordable not just for low-wage workers, but also for many recent college graduates struggling with debt and entry-level salaries. It's an issue for teachers, nurses, social workers and first responders, among many other essential workers. Sometimes they can't afford to live in the communities where they work.

The money that Scott called for diverting would boost the state's short supply of affordable housing by multiple means. Down payments and closing costs for first-time homebuyers. Repairs for low-income homeowners. Construction and rehabilitation of rental housing. It's a flexible approach that communities can adapt to fit their unique needs.

And when the state invests in affordable housing, businesses jump in. Every \$1 spent by the state attracts \$4 to \$6 in private investment, according to the Sadowski Coalition.

If legislators fully restore the funding due affordable housing in the next budget year, local governments in Central Florida can look forward to sizable grants. Orange County would receive the largest share, at more than \$10 million, but Lake (\$3.2 million), Osceola (\$2.5 million), Seminole (\$4.5 million), Orlando (\$2.7 million) and Kissimmee (\$700,000) would also get state help in providing more families in their communities access to homes they can afford.

Legislators could prove, contrary to Scott's accusation, that they do care about jobs by fully restoring next year's state funding for affordable housing.