

# Orlando Sentinel

## Editorial: Scott, House need to join Senate in protecting affordable housing trust funds

By [Orlando Sentinel Editorial Board](#)

FEBRUARY 23, 2018, 6:55 PM

**T**here might be no broader coalition in Tallahassee than the one that supports full funding for affordable-housing programs in Florida.

The state's leading business groups — including the Florida Chamber of Commerce, Associated Industries of Florida, the Florida Bankers Association and the Florida Retail Federation — are members of the Sadowski Housing Coalition. So are advocates for the poor, seniors, veterans and people with disabilities.

So are government associations, including the Florida Association of Counties and the Florida League of Cities. So are faith-based organizations, including the Florida Conference of Catholic Bishops.

But there are at least two major players who have taken positions on the opposite side of this issue: Gov. [Rick Scott](#) and [Florida House](#) leaders.

In 1992, the Florida Legislature passed the Sadowski Act, raising the documentary stamp tax paid on all real-estate transactions and dedicating the increased revenue for affordable-housing trust funds. Those funds bankroll state and local programs to expand the supply of houses and apartments within the financial reach of low- and middle-income families.

These programs are designed to be flexible to adapt to the needs of diverse communities, paying for everything from new construction to renovation to down

payments and closing cost assistance. Every county and larger city in the state receives grants to expand affordable housing.

But starting in 2001, legislators began treating the trust funds more like slush funds, raiding them for cash to spend on pet projects, or to fill budget holes created by tax cuts. Since then, they've plundered almost \$2 billion.

Meanwhile, Florida's shortage of affordable housing has gone from bad to worse. According to the Sadowski Coalition, more than 900,000 low-income households in the state pay more than half their income for housing, leaving them one missed paycheck away from homelessness. Many middle-income workers filling essential jobs — police officers, teachers, social workers — can't find affordable places to live in the communities where they work.

Last year the Legislature created a task force on affordable housing that came back with a series of recommendations. Some are in legislation now advancing through both chambers. But perhaps the most consequential recommendation of all — leave the trust funds alone — was ignored by the governor and the House.

The budget proposal Scott delivered to the Legislature in November diverted \$92 million from the \$314 million projected to flow into the affordable-housing trust funds in the fiscal year starting July 1. And the budget the House passed earlier this month showed even less respect for the trust funds, pulling out \$182 million.

Only the budget passed by the Senate would keep the funds intact. Bills in the Senate and the House that would have outlawed raids on the funds are stalled in committee.

Now the two chambers must reconcile their rival budgets before passing a final version and sending it to the governor. The only sensible policy is for legislators to adopt the Senate's position and keep the trust funds whole.

Raiding the trust funds is never a good idea. Doing so now would be beyond irresponsible, after Hurricane Maria exacerbated the affordable-housing shortage by spurring an exodus of tens of thousands of Puerto Ricans to Florida.

Spending the entire \$314 million in the trust funds wouldn't just address one of Florida's most urgent needs. It also would create more than 30,000 jobs and pump more than \$4 billion into the state's economy, according to the Sadowski Coalition. Every \$1 the state invests attracts \$4 to \$6 in matching federal and private money.

Scott and House leaders regularly tout their interest in creating jobs and strengthening Florida's economy. They can show they mean it by embracing the Senate's commitment to protect the affordable-housing trust funds.