



# Legislature raids Florida's affordable-housing fund

By Craig Patrick  
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TAMPA (FOX 13) - A government fund called the State Housing Initiatives Partnership helps struggling families buy homes. It also helps the elderly and disabled stay in their homes. However, many of the people the program is intended to assist may lose out, because state lawmakers have been raiding the affordable housing trust funds.

"Those dollars are unfortunately swept by the legislature and swept significantly this year to be used for who knows what," said Pasco Tax Collector Mike Fasano. "That's going to have a huge impact on the little guy and gal."

Home and property buyers pay into it the SHIP program with taxes on real estate sales. The money helps build affordable housing, and helps families and senior citizens in financial crisis buy or fix their homes.

Jeff Bagwell, executive director of the non-profit Keystone Challenge, has helped connect people to this state program for more than 25 years. "A lot of the rehab money is used for senior citizens for emergency repairs, roofs, septic systems...air conditioning, central heat and air," he said. "It changes their life. It gives them a purpose."

Bagwell said Dana Winfree is a prime example of how it pays off. She's come a long way in six years from the days she lost loved ones, plunged into a crystal meth addiction and lost her way.

"Out there on the street it was easier for me to get drugs than food. And that's the truth," she said.

First, she received treatment and transitional housing, and was reunited with her children. Then she got state help in buying a house through SHIP. Now she's now a home owner, and her family is back together.

The program cost taxpayers \$12,000, but it also put a lien on her house, so if she moves in the coming years, the money would be returned.

"They're taxpayers, buying things for their home. The children now have a safe place to go," said Bagwell.

Now he and other SHIP advocates are concerned, because they say the legislature pulled more than \$180-million from the affordable housing trust funds this year, and they had already been raiding it for the past several years -- collectively using more than \$2-billion to pay for other programs in the budget.

Dana Winfree hoped her story may convince lawmakers to refrain from raiding the affordable housing trust funds next year.

"You get a family off the street. You get a family out of homelessness," she said. There's some other family out there. There are other people that need the help like I got. They might not be able to make it."

Governor Scott's team responded by stating more than \$1-billion has been invested in affordable housing in Florida since he took office. His team also provided links to his administration's accomplishments:

- Governor's office press release: [June 28](#)

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Article last accessed on July 25, 2018 [here](#).