

FLAPOL

Housing advocates pressure Ron DeSantis to veto Sadowski sweeps

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Those who cheered Ron DeSantis' position on affordable housing are now asking the Republican Governor to double down as he prepares to act on the spending plan passed by the Legislature earlier in May.

In a letter recently hand-delivered to the Governor's office, the Sadowski Coalition implored DeSantis to use his line-item veto power to reject the Legislature's plan to sweep \$125 million from state and local housing trust funds — funded by what's known as the Sadowski Trust. A tax remitted on real estate transactions funds the dedicated pool of money.

Historically, the Legislature has raided the Sadowski Trust to fund other parts of the budget. Last year, for example, the budget approved by then-Gov. transferred \$182 million out of the affordable housing programs into General Revenue.

Although more money in this year's spending plan is headed toward affordable housing, the Sadowski Coalition wants DeSantis to send a message to lawmakers that he won't tolerate sweeps.

In his proposed budget presented to the Legislature earlier this year, DeSantis recommended fully funding the Sadowski Trust, then estimated to be worth \$338 million.

"You got it right from the beginning," wrote Jaimie Ross, president and CEO of the Florida Housing Coalition and author of the veto request.

During the 2019 Legislative Session, the Senate backed an initial spending plan left affordable housing dollars untouched.

But the House moved forward with a proposal to continue sweeps, keep the Sadowski funding constant to the current year and spend those dollars exclusively on the Panhandle because of housing issues stemming from Hurricane Michael.

Eventually, the two chambers compromised on a plan to fund statewide affordable housing programs at more than \$85 million. Similar programs tailor-fitted for hurricane recovery in the Panhandle received \$115 million in the final budget. Because the sweeps appear as separate line items, DeSantis could veto them without altering those appropriations.

Ideally, the vetoed money would be used for affordable housing when lawmakers return to Tallahassee next year, Ross told Florida Politics.

"Our position is that all the housing trust fund money should be used for housing," Ross said.

There's precedent for trust-fund sweeps. Scott in 2017, for example, vetoed \$91.4 million in transfers from varied trust funds.

DeSantis, during remarks delivered after the Legislature adjourned for the final time this year, promised to trim the \$91.1 billion plan lawmakers agreed to. He also expressed a desire to put more money into the state's reserves.

While speaking to reporters, DeSantis highlighted the increased affordable housing appropriation as something that appeals to Democrats in Florida.

"We did a big increase to affordable housing, which is important to a lot of liberals," he said. A request for comment on the veto plea is pending with DeSantis' office.