

EDITORIAL: Sadowski funds among targets in '20 Legislature

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OUR POSITION: When the Florida Legislature convenes Jan. 14, 2020, we should be paying attention to how lawmakers handle the millions of dollars in the Sadowski Housing Trust Fund.

The Florida Association of Counties has a long laundry list of topics and bills it will lobby for or against when legislators return to Tallahassee in 2020. Few, if any, are more of a priority than the funding of the Sadowski Affordable Housing Act.

Cragin Mosteller, director of external affairs for FAC, visited with the Sun's editorial board this past week to discuss everything from water quality and how septic to sewer conversion will be funded to whether or not Visit Florida and Enterprise Florida will survive.

We agree with Mosteller that one issue that impacts all of Florida is whether or not lawmakers will break their habit of stealing money from the Sadowski trust.

Having "affordable" housing is vital to every city and county in Florida. It affects job opportunities, education and growth. Ask anyone trying to hire lower to mid-level managers or hourly employees how important it is for them to find a home or apartment they can afford.

The William E. Sadowski Affordable Housing Act was established in 1992. Its funds derive from doc stamps initiated on every property transaction in Florida. The act says that 70% of all funds from doc stamps should go to the Local Government Housing Trust Fund for the State Housing Initiatives Partnership (SHIP). Those funds are used to help county and city governments produce and preserve affordable home ownership and multifamily housing for very low or moderate income families. The other 30% of the funds to the the State Housing Trust Fund for the State Apartment Incentive Loan (SAIL) program.

Never before have these funding mechanisms been so badly needed in Florida.

Statistics show, according to the FAC, that a full-time hourly worker making minimum wage, \$8.46 an hour, would need to work 108 hours a week to afford a modest two-bedroom rental. The average housing wage, or hourly wage when full-time workers spend no more than the suggested 30% on housing expenses, would be \$22.86 in the Sunshine State.

How many people do you know making almost \$23 an hour?

If the answer is "not many" that is no surprise. Sixty-seven percent of jobs in Florida pay less than \$20 an hour.

According to FAC, the affordable rent for one person making the minimum wage is \$440 a month. Meanwhile, fair market value for a modest two-bedroom home is \$1,189.

The need to pump Sadowski money into affordable housing is great. Yet lawmakers raid the fund every year. In 2019-20 legislators put \$2.6 million into the fund to help build lower-cost housing. But, they took \$125 million that should have gone toward housing and swept it into the general fund.

Some lawmakers are under the mistaken impression that another \$125 million would not make a big difference for housing.

The logo features the word "SUN" in white, bold, sans-serif capital letters inside a blue rectangular box. A yellow sun with rays is positioned above the "N". To the right of the box, the words "Port Charlotte" are written in a large, black, serif font.

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They are wrong. If the Sadowski fund had been fully funded last year Charlotte County would have received \$2.1 million to build multi-family housing. Instead we got \$360,000. Sarasota County would have received \$5 million but was only allotted \$654,000.

Much could be done with the money the Legislature promised to give counties through the Sadowski Act.

When lawmakers return to Tallahassee in two months, they must pledge to quit raiding that fund and give counties an opportunity to provide housing that can create thousands of jobs and have a huge economic impact in the state.

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