

'Affordable housing' is vital for first responders, educators. Fund it | Opinion

Ron Lieberman, Your Turn | March 7, 2020

The state of Florida has problems with affordable housing for our workforce. Our lawmakers know this, and it is why the Sadowski Housing Trust Fund was created almost 30 years ago.

Each year the Florida Legislature allocates funding for affordable housing, and yet each year we come up short. This year, we must do better. It is imperative the Sadowski Housing Trust Fund receives full funding and that lawmakers mandate that the revenue in these funds be used only for increasing affordable housing throughout the state.

Florida Housing Finance Corporation, the state's housing finance agency, is celebrating its 40th anniversary and has assisted more than 2 million Floridians with their housing needs. Florida Housing partners with developers, lenders and nonprofits across the state to finance affordable housing properties specifically tailored to demographics such as senior citizens, families, veterans and persons with disabilities.

Approximately 30% of the Sadowski Housing Trust Fund revenues flow into the State Housing Trust Fund and 70% flow into the Local Government Housing Trust Fund. These dollars fund many state and local programs that Florida Housing supports, such as the State Apartment Incentive Loan program, the State Housing Initiatives Partnership program, and other home ownership and rental assistance resources.

As board chair of Florida Housing Finance Corporation, and a builder of affordable housing properties for more than 30 years, I have witnessed what having a place to call home does for a family. There is no better feeling than providing a hard-working family the keys to a home they never thought they would be able to afford.

The state of Florida was built on the pillars of tourism, agriculture and retirement real estate. The individuals employed in these industries are hard-working members of our communities, like educators and first responders, who simply cannot afford a decent place to live. These individuals help make Florida a great place to live, and the Sadowski Housing Trust ensures they can continue to work hard and live in their community. When people have a place to call home, it facilitates a healthy family environment, builds stronger communities and increases local economic impact.

This year, more than \$387 million is available through the Sadowski Housing Trust Fund to support statewide affordable housing initiatives. That money is leveraged with other sources to allow affordable housing developers to finance the build of new properties that increases the supply of safe, quality housing for all.

Gov. DeSantis and the Senate have shown that they understand the critical need for affordable housing for working- and middle-class residents. Florida lawmakers now hold a part of the solution in their hands and can support this mission by voting for full funding of the Sadowski Housing Trust Fund this year.

Without this support, affordable housing issues will only continue to get worse.

Ron Lieberman is the board chair of the Florida Housing Finance Corporation. He is past president of the Florida Home Builders Association as well as chairman of the Tampa Bay Regional Transportation Authority Advisory Committee.

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