



Editorial | Legislation makes sense for those in need

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THE ISSUE: *Bill to protect affordable housing fund receives Senate panel's OK.*

OUR OPINION: *Do what's right for the citizens.*

In 1992, the state Legislature created the Sadowski Affordable Housing Trust Fund, but lawmakers have repeatedly swept those funds into the general revenue pot since the Great Recession.

However, Clearwater Republican Sen. Ed Hooper hopes to put a halt to that. He recently filed Senate Bill 510, which would add the state and local government housing trust funds to the list of 10 other trust funds that are "off limits" in most circumstances.

Affordable housing funding used for its intended purpose would not only benefit the state's most vulnerable citizens facing housing insecurity, but also create thousands of jobs and put millions into state and local coffers.

Creating affordable housing for folks isn't just necessary, it's the right thing to do for a state that is tourism-centric, which means most jobs here are in the service industry. Those folks deserve a shot at the "American dream."

Affordable housing is a basic need, and yet it's still hard to find. The lack of affordable housing is often most obvious in high-tourist areas where the price of real estate is sky high and workers who support the economy can't afford to live in the area they serve.

Florida, and the United States as a whole, has a housing affordability problem. Home prices are rising quickly with wages lagging in 80% of U.S. markets, according to ATTOM, a real estate and property data company. Close to two-thirds of those who rent say they couldn't afford to purchase a house.

Reports from the federal government defines housing affordable when a person can pay for it using less than 30% of their gross income. Full-time workers earning minimum wage can't afford a "modest" two-bedroom apartment without being cost-burdened, reports show.

The National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC) shows the U.S. has a shortage of upward of 7 million affordable rental homes based on the national poverty line or 30% of the local median income, according to an NLIHC report.

Affordable or low-incoming housing developments are stigmatized, but it is past time we look past the stigma of "affordable housing," and realize it's much more about providing affordable "workforce housing" for the millions working in service-related jobs.

Studies have proven that the construction of affordable housing gives a significant boost to the economy. Also, if done well like the one recently completed in Inverness, affordable housing can be a valuable,



aesthetic plus for a community. With services the largest sector of Florida's economy, affordable housing is important to recruiting and retaining workers.

This bill makes sense, but now Hooper's colleagues in the Senate as well as in the House need to comprehend its importance.

We hope they do.

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