



EDITORIAL: Stealing from Sadowski fund happening again

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OUR POSITION: The Florida Legislature is all but sure to once again raid the Sadowski Trust Fund to shortchange counties on money that can be used to build affordable housing.

Lawmakers in Tallahassee, year after year, just can't keep their hands off money that is ticketed for the Sadowski Trust Fund to help build more affordable housing in Florida.

It's happening again right now with House Bill 5401 and Senate Bill 2512 allowing legislators to balance the state budget by taking money meant for affordable housing and slipping it into budgets for other projects favored by Gov. DeSantis and GOP legislators.

We shouldn't be surprised. This has been going on for a long time — almost ever since the trust fund was created using doc stamp funds charged on the sale of real estate. That money was supposed to go to each county to be used to entice developers to build affordable housing. For a while it worked with Charlotte County building apartment complexes like Murdock Circle Apartments in Port Charlotte. Then the funding began to dry up as the money was too tempting to lawmakers.

In 2019-20, legislators raided the Sadowski fund for \$125 million and used it to balance the Florida budget — a requirement before they adjourn each year.

Last year, the Legislature borrowed more money and shortchanged Charlotte County by \$2.1 million it would have received for much needed housing. Sarasota lost more than \$4 million in Sadowski funding.

The worst thing about these two bills that are pending in Tallahassee is they could allow money to be permanently siphoned from the Sadowski fund. That would be pure robbery and a break of trust with Floridians who count on their lawmakers to keep their promises.

If these bills are signed into law this year, funding for the Sadowski Trust Funds would be reduced from \$423.3 million to \$141 million. The SHIP program would be reduced from \$296 million to \$99 million — drastically reducing the amount of SHIP funds each of the 119 participating local governments receive to fund affordable housing goals.

Charlotte County could lose \$250,000 and Sarasota County \$500,000. DeSoto, luckily, right now would not see a reduction in its Sadowski funding. But, let's remember, these are preliminary numbers. Anything goes when the deadline nears to balance a budget in Tallahassee.

There are two main programs that will benefit from the stolen funds. They are the Wastewater Grant Program and the proposed Resilient Florida Grant Program.

We're in favor of both projects. We just don't believe in robbing Peter to pay Paul.

We've argued before how short-changing the Sadowski fund hurts Florida in ways other than less money for affordable housing.



A study by the Sadowski Coalition and reported by the Regional Economic Consulting Group, looked at the economic impact of using all the money meant for the trust fund on its intended purpose — affordable housing.

The study claims more than \$167 million in taxes would be collected and returned to Florida. And, using the trust fund money for housing would mean up to 47,000 Floridians in a new home. That's not to mention the 33,286 jobs the construction would create. The overall impact could reach \$5 billion for Florida's budget.

Continuing to raid the Sadowski Trust Fund is a short-sighted mistake. Tell your representatives to not vote for them.

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