

Florida Housing: Effective Advocacy in the Sunshine State

Florida Housing Finance Corporation
Legislative Advocacy: State Advocacy

HFA Staff Contact

Taylor Maxey

taylor.maxey@floridahousing.org



OVERVIEW

The Florida Housing Finance Corporation (Florida Housing) was created by the Legislature 41 years ago. As the state's housing finance agency that administers state and federal resources, our mission is to help provide affordable homeownership and rental housing options and resources for citizens of Florida.



HISTORY- DEDICATED REVENUE SOURCE

The Florida State Legislature enacted the William E. Sadowski Affordable Housing Act in 1992 that created a dedicated source of revenue for affordable housing from a portion of documentary stamp taxes on the transfer of real estate. Supported by a coalition of interest groups, including home builders and Realtors®, this landmark legislation provided both the funding mechanism for state and local programs, as well as a flexible, but accountable framework for local programs to operate. The Legislature appropriates the housing trust fund dollars, composed of the State Housing Trust Fund and the Local Government Housing Trust. Historically, the housing trust funds were completely used to fund affordable housing programs, with little to no sweeps of the funds into the state's General Revenue. That all changed with the housing market crash. Since then, a portion of the Housing Trust Funds have been swept into General Revenue with smaller appropriations provided for affordable housing.

In his first two years in office, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis recommended full funding of the Housing Trust Funds. This has not been a recommendation from a governor in Florida in 20 years! Affordable housing advocates and stakeholders applauded statewide. While the Housing Trust Funds have not been fully funded, great gains have been made to increase the appropriation amount.



FOCUSING ON EFFECTIVE ADVOCACY EFFORTS

Statewide Development Tours

Florida is a large and diverse state, 447 miles long and 361 miles wide, so it's not easy to travel the state and meet with our legislative delegation. Florida has 120 House members and 40 Senators, so the challenge to educate members is great. Term limits enacted years ago have added to the lack of knowledge in our elected officials. During committee weeks leading up to the legislative session, it can be difficult to get a significant amount of time with legislators or their staff; once a meeting is set, it is usually 15-minutes. Florida Housing held a strategy meeting to develop effective ways to reach elected officials in a way that would resonate with them.

One strategy was to organize bus tours around the 4 regional Board of Directors meetings held around the state. First, we identify developments in good standing with the Corporation, develop an agenda, and invite both federal, state, and locally elected officials and their staff to join us on the bus or travel to meet us separately on-site. We provide one-pagers with the details of each

property; the population served, number of units, developer, and financing. We also invited the developers to present their properties and the competitiveness of the application cycle and their passion to provide housing.

These tours, while being some of the simplest forms of grassroots advocacy, have been highly effective in educating elected officials and their staff, and dispel misperceptions about affordable housing in Florida. Elected officials were pleasantly surprised by the high quality of the properties visited in their district, thereby creating a lasting positive impression.

Simplified and Targeted Marketing Material-LEGO Houses

In the past, Florida Housing struggled to create materials with a simplified message on our affordable housing programs. The State Housing Initiatives Partnership (SHIP) and State Apartment Incentive Loan (SAIL) programs are the two programs funded by the Florida Legislature through the Housing Trust Funds. This time, Florida Housing worked towards strategically creating a marketing piece/leave-behind for elected officials that would explain the two programs and the need for full funding. The LEGO houses highlighted, “Keep A Roof Over Floridians’ Heads”; if 100 percent of appropriated funding is used by each program; the economic impact of what that trust fund could do and how it can be leveraged; and the funds, as they are repaid, recycle back into that particular program to continue providing affordable housing options to citizens in the state.

The LEGO houses were hand delivered to state elected officials during the 2020 legislative session. In return, legislative staff have had a number of elected officials and essential staffers call and email to thank them, request more information on the housing programs, and set up meetings to further discuss affordable housing.

“Welcome to Florida Housing” Video

A short video was also created as another effort to educate elected officials and staff on Florida Housing, the Housing Trust Funds, and why full funding is important. Elected officials were appreciative of the educational video and now use it as a refresher on the programs and funding.

Email Blasts

Florida Housing sent an email blast to state legislators just after the elections in November. We used it as an opportunity to introduce Florida Housing and our legislative team to the old and new members. We offered individual virtual briefings to give them an overview of our organization. Often, those meetings led to a more in depth briefing with the legislator, staff and our Senior Managers when members were in town for committee meetings. We provided information on our programs, funding, and initiatives in their specific districts.

All these marketing pieces were conceptualized, designed, and produced by Florida Housing and a third-party PR firm for approximately \$7,000.



RESULTS

Due to the effective advocacy efforts mentioned above, Florida Housing has seen an increase in funding and a better understanding of who we are by elected officials. In 2020, Florida Housing was appropriated \$395 million which included disaster and pandemic relief funds that assisted tens of thousands of Floridians with mortgage and rental assistance. Moreover, the Governor announced in February his recommendation of \$423.3 million towards the Housing Trust Funds for Fiscal Year 2021/22.



VISUALS

Pictured below are examples of the marketing materials created for Florida Housing's Legislative Advocacy Outreach.

During the 2020 Florida Legislative Session, LEGO Houses were distributed to the Florida House of Representatives and the Florida Senate. Attached to these LEGO Houses was a brief description of Florida Housing. This was a popular method of outreach, as many Members of the Florida House and Senate displayed their LEGO House in their Capitol Office.

The "Welcome to Florida Housing" video served as an educational piece for Florida Elected Officials. This video detailed Florida Housing, Housing Trust Funds, and the need for full funding. The welcome video is still relevant and used as a refresher for Florida Elected Officials and staff.

One of the incredible projects we were able to tour in 2020, was the Metro 510 in Tampa, Florida. The Metro 510 has 120 units for families at or below 60% AMI. This incredible housing facility is located in the heart of downtown, making it a prime location that is actually affordable.

Communication with Members of the Florida Legislature is a regular occurrence. However, one of the most effective methods of providing information for the Florida Legislature is through email blasts. One example of our email blasts is for the purpose of educational opportunities.



[LEGO Houses Delivered to Elected Officials](#)

["Welcome to Florida Housing" Video](#)



[Jacksonville Bus Tour of Properties](#)

[Photo at Metro 510 Property](#)

[Tampa Bus Tour of Properties](#)

Representative Andrade,

Hello!

I am Stephanie Sutton, External Affairs Director for the Florida Housing Finance Corporation. I oversee the Corporation's legislative priorities and communications. I started working in government and politics 25 years ago and spent the last couple years with the Florida Housing Team.

Florida Housing is a public corporation of the State of Florida. Back in the 90's, the Legislature moved it out of the Department of Community Affairs and made it a quasi-governmental entity. Florida Housing is a financial institution that administers federal and state resources to provide low interest financing to homeowners and finances the development and preservation of affordable homeowner and rental housing. State funding for affordable housing comes from documentary stamp taxes that flow through two trust funds: the State Housing Trust Fund and the Local Government Housing Trust fund. Florida Housing does not normally receive General Revenue.

While not a department of the executive branch of state government, we are still subject to the Government-in-the-Sunshine Law, the Public Records Act, the Administrative Procedure Act, audits by the Chief Financial Officer for the State of Florida and the State Auditor General, and various other state and federal entities.

Florida Housing is governed by a Board of Directors, with eight members appointed by the Governor and subject to Senate confirmation, and the executive director of the Department of Economic Opportunity (or their designee) as an ex officio, voting member. You may know our Executive Director, Trey Price. He has over 20 years of real estate and political experience.

I hope you take a minute to enjoy a [short video](#) (1 minute) that explains how we have been making home a reality for hardworking Floridians for 40 years. Please do not hesitate to reach out if you have any questions or would like to schedule a meeting.

[Email blast to Elected Officials](#)