



Responding to the Needs of the Community

NEWS RELEASE

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MEDIA CONTACT:

Lesa Weikel, Community Relations Manager

Office: 813-223-6115; Cell: 727-421-0240

Email: Lesa@homelessofhc.org

Editors Note: *Press Conference including Rep. Kevin Ambler (Tampa), Rep. Priscilla Taylor (Palm Beach) and Rayme L. Nuckles, CEO, Homeless Coalition of Hillsborough County will beheld on Wednesday, March 28, 2007 at 10:30 a.m. on the 4th floor of the Capitol Building, Rotunda area.*

Hillsborough State Lawmakers ‘Champion’ Homeless Legislation

Reps. Ambler and Culp; Sens. Crist and Joyner support key issues.

TALLAHASSEE, FL. – (Monday, March 26, 2007) –Advocates from around the state will be in Tallahassee on Wednesday, March 28th as part of the state-wide Homeless Legislative Day. A press conference, at 10:30 a.m. on the 4th floor of the Capitol Building, Rotunda area, will include Rep. Kevin Ambler(Tampa), Rep. Priscilla Taylor (Riviera Beach) and Rayme L. Nuckles, CEO of the Homeless Coalition of Hillsborough County and president of the Florida Coalition for the Homeless.

“We recognize the needs of homeless men, women and children in our state, and I look forward to working with my colleagues in the Florida House and Senate to address these needs. Hillsborough County Legislative Delegation members are taking lead on strong initiatives to provide safety and protection for a vulnerable population,” Rep. Ambler said.

Last session, as part of the House Healthcare Appropriations committee Rep. Ambler successfully advocated for increased funding for the state’s homeless assistance programs. Through a \$2 million increase in Homeless Housing Assistance grant funding, the development of housing options for homeless people increased by 31 percent, when compared to those developed the previous year.

This year, Rep. Ambler has sponsored two community budget requests for Hillsborough County, the County with the largest homeless population in the state, to assist in developing a customer service center and voicemail system that will help homeless people in their employment efforts.

Representative Faye Culp (Tampa) is sponsoring a bill that would revise the state's definition of homelessness to include families doubled up because of economic hardship and loss of housing. This change will also allow communities to use state homeless assistance funding for prevention efforts, instead of requiring an individual or family to literally be on the street before being eligible for help.

"The current definition essentially mandates that communities work in the least cost-effective and efficient process of assisting a family out of homelessness as opposed to preventing them from becoming homeless," said Nuckles. "We've learned from other communities that it cost an estimated \$12,000 to help a family out of homelessness; while preventing them from being homeless costs around \$1,600."

Senator Victor Crist (Tampa) is sponsoring a similar bill in the Florida Senate, SB 2824 that would revise the state's definition of homelessness.

Senator Arthenia Joyner (Tampa) is sponsoring a bill aimed at protecting homeless people from violence. SB 1458 would add 'homeless status' to the state's current Hate Crimes law. This addition would apply stiffer penalties to those who deliberately and intentionally choose their victims because they (victim) are homeless.

"Violence against homeless people continues to rise; and Florida currently leads the nation in these crimes," said Nuckles. "The majority of this violence is committed by groups of young men who seek out homeless people to victimize."

More than 50 advocates, including 10 from Hillsborough County, will meet with their elected officials during Homeless Legislative Day. The advocates plan to educate the lawmakers about the needs of homeless people in the state and how, as lawmakers, they can make decisions to positively impact the lives of the nearly 86,000 men, women and children who are homeless.

The advocates will be focusing on five key issues: increasing housing options for extremely low income households, removing the cap on the Sadowski Housing Trust Fund, increasing funding for the state's homeless assistance programs, revising the state's definition of homelessness and protecting homeless people from violence.

“Our focus is to present our common vision,” said Nuckles. “The Governor stated in his inaugural address, that Floridians have a common vision for a safe home. A safe home includes an affordable house or apartment – safe from the elements, violence and degrading conditions homeless people live with every day. We are calling on our elected officials to be part of this common vision.”

The state-wide Homeless Legislative Day is presented by the Florida Coalition for the Homeless, funded by the Miami Coalition for the Homeless and coordinated by the Homeless Coalition of Hillsborough County.

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