



# Update 2008

*A Report on Legislative Action  
on Issues of Economic Justice*

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## A moribund session . . .

It started very slowly, as legislators spent the first couple of weeks trying to figure out how to cut about \$500 million out of this year's budget. Few bills were heard. After getting over that hump, attention turned to cutting more than \$3 billion out of next year's budget. Although the Legislature ended up sweeping more trust funds and raiding more reserves than originally anticipated to fund such important programs as Healthy Start and Hospice among others, Healthy Families, child welfare services and adoption subsidies, nursing homes, Medicaid recipients, services for the elderly and disabled, school readiness, juvenile justice and education sustained heavy, even crippling hits.

--From United Way of Florida's *Legislative Link*



## A Free School Breakfast in Florida

Despite the fact that Florida ranks second in the nation for its high percentage of schools that offer children a school breakfast, less than one in three Florida children from low-income families participate—leaving over \$192 million unused federal funds for school breakfast on the table in Washington. That figure could potentially feed an additional 864,000 eligible Florida school children and thereby reduce school absences, school nurse visits, and behavioral problems in the classroom.

Bills sponsored by Representative Will Kendrick and Senator Steve Wise—in their original form—sought to address the primary reasons children were not participating in greater numbers. It provided for alternative, more flexible settings to the cafeteria and required free breakfast to all students as a way to reduce paperwork and remove the stigma often associated with school breakfast (especially among older students).

In the end, legislation was passed to direct the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability (OPPAGA) to conduct an analysis of the school district food service programs and submit a report to the Governor, the President of the Senate, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, the members of the State Board of Education, and the Commissioner of Education. This report would inform the consideration of similar legislation in the future.

**The legislation specifically asks OPPAGA to address the following major points (among others):**

- Estimate the district-by-district cost if each school district implements a universal-free school breakfast program in all elementary, middle, and high schools. This includes studying the

financial impact of limiting participation in a universal-free school breakfast program to schools having various percentages of students eligible for free or reduced-price meals (like the 80% designated in the original bill). It also takes into consideration the impact on student participation rates and marginal costs per breakfast meal of alternatives to serving meals in school cafeterias.

- Determine the extent to which school district food service programs are fiscally self-sufficient or require financial support from other district operating funds.
- Identify best practices for the efficient and effective operation of school district food service programs, which shall include strategies for a school district to reduce the costs of its food service programs without sacrificing the nutritional value of meals.
- Evaluate the organizational structure of the state for, and the state implementation and programmatic management of, federal programs administered by the Food and Nutrition Service of the United States Department of Agriculture, including, but not limited to, the National School Lunch Program, the federal School Breakfast Program, and the federal Summer Food Service Program. (There has been some interest in transferring federal school nutrition programs from the Florida Department of Education to the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services.)

The deadline for the report is January 15, 2009. A copy of the entire legislation can be viewed at: <http://www.myflorida-house.gov/Sections/Documents/loadoc.aspx?FileName=h0623er.xml&DocumentType=Bill&BillNumber=0623&Session=2008>.





## Affordable Housing in Florida

The Florida Legislature ended its 2008 session with less than adequate results for affordable housing. In fact, housing took a 22 percent hit in funding-- significantly disproportionate to other line items. Legislation to repeal the cap was introduced in both the House and Senate but was not heard in even one committee.

What happened in this session was no accident. The defacto cap that began during the last administration—when monies in the trust funds were left unappropriated year after year while housing needs went unmet—was ultimately swept into General Revenue. That sweep has now been made. The state and local housing trust funds will have less than \$30 million beyond the \$234 million cap amount.

### In summary:

- Fiscal Year 2008-09 appropriations for housing were \$303 million—down \$87.8 million (22.5%) from this year's funding level and down \$130 million (30%) from FY06-07 funding.
- \$250 million was swept from the housing trust funds and moved to general revenue (not spent on housing). This \$250 million was originally deposited into the housing trust funds from documentary stamp taxes dedicated to affordable housing. It was available because the Legislature failed to appropriate the funds for housing (though it was collected for that purpose).
- Another \$87.6 million will be swept (during FY08-09) into General Revenue due to the \$243 million cap on distribution of doc stamp revenue to the housing trust funds. This year \$96 million is being swept because of the cap.
- Adding all of that up: the two-year sweep of funds that were dedicated to affordable housing by the Sadowski Act to pay for other non-housing items comes to \$433.6 million!
- No substantive housing legislation passed. This is because all the housing issues were combined into an omnibus bill (HB 699), which was taken up by the Senate in SB 482. The House amended the Senate bill with growth management issues, which the Senate failed to take up with just hours to go before the end of 2008 session. Therefore, identical housing bills failed to pass both houses, causing the legislation to fail.

[Source: Sadowski Workforce Housing Coalition.]





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1331 E. Lafayette Street, Suite A  
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