

From: Darla-Peoplepc [mailto:letournd@peoplepc.com]

Sent: Wednesday, March 11, 2009 7:06 PM

To: Governor Crist (charlie.crist@myflorida.com); Lt. Gov. Jeff Kottkamp (jeff.kottkamp@myflorida.com); Rep. Gary Aubuchon (gary.aubuchon@myfloridahouse.gov); Rep. Ken Roberson (ken.roberson@myfloridahouse.gov); Rep. Nick Thompson (nick.thompson@myfloridahouse.gov); 'Rep. Paige Kreegel (paige.kreegel@myfloridahouse.gov)'; 'Rep. Trudi Williams (trudi.williams@myfloridahouse.gov)'; 'Senator Dave Aronberg (aronberg.dave.web@flsenate.gov)'; Senator Garrett (richter.garrett.web@flsenate.gov); 'Senator Mike Bennett (bennet.mike.web@flsenate.gov)'

Cc: Bob Janes (dist1@leegov.com); Kevin Lewis; Rosemary Boisvert (r_boisvert@swfas.org)

Subject: Protect substance abuse funding

Importance: High

Dear State Legislators:

Florida is facing an economic crisis that makes it imperative to find ways to cost-effectively meet the needs of the citizens of Florida. As pointed out in a recently released Pew Foundation report (see article below),

Florida's correctional spending as a percentage of state general funds is one of the highest in the nation, with between 9-10% of all Florida tax dollars going to prisons.

Governor Crist's 2009 budget recognized that a change in policy was needed and proposed investing in prevention and diversion strategies rather than building more and more jails. The Legislature should be guided by the Governor's policy direction as it makes these budget decisions. As the Director of the Pew Center on the States stated, "Corrections is one area they can cut and still have good or better outcomes than what they are doing now." In Lee County, we know diversion and prevention programs work. Lee County's 2006-2007 initiative to reduce juvenile delinquency commitments resulted in reducing the county's rate by 26%, which saved the county \$3.4 million. With a prison bed costing \$58,410 for the average 33 month stay of a prisoner in Florida, spending \$5,968 for a drug treatment bed for the average 7 month stay is a major savings in public funds that also benefits the person and society at large.

Not treating substance use disorders is bad public policy, it is not effective for public safety (due to high recidivism rates for offenders who need but don't receive treatment), and it is bad fiscal policy. I urge you not to cut funds for substance abuse programs, including the \$13.6 million for programs that reach and help stabilize thousands of Floridians and their families and children. In addition to shifting funds from prisons to prevention and diversion programs, I urge you to pass a \$1/pack tax on cigarettes and close the tax loopholes that were put in place during the past Administration as a way to raise revenues needed to protect critical human services for Floridians.

Thank you for your consideration of my views.

Darla

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