LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE

SB 152 — Property Appraiser Assessments
by Senator Saunders

This bill amends s. 193.023, F.S., to provide that county property appraisers must physically inspect property at least once every five years, rather than every three years as required under current law. Additionally, the bill authorizes county property appraisers to review, as deemed necessary, image technology in assessing the value of real property.

If approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect upon becoming law.
Vote: Senate 39-0; House 119-1

CS/SB 264 — Homestead Assessments
by Government Efficiency Appropriations Committee and Senators Fasano, Crist, and Atwater

This bill amends s. 193.155, F.S., to provide that there is no change in ownership of a homestead property if a change or transfer is by means of an instrument in which the owner is listed as both grantor and grantee of the real property and one or more individuals are additionally named as grantee. As a result, a change or transfer that merely adds an additional person or persons to the title does not trigger a change in ownership. However, if an individual who is added to a title applies for a homestead exemption on the property, the application is considered a change of ownership and reassessment is required.

The effect of this bill is that an individual may add one or more co-owners to the deed for homestead property without losing the Save Our Homes benefit, assuming the individual continues to qualify for the homestead exemption on the property.

If approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect July 1, 2006.
Vote: Senate 38-0; House 114-1

SB 490 — Property Tax Administration
by Senator Diaz de la Portilla

The Department of Revenue (DOR) is currently required to conduct an in-depth review of every property appraiser's assessment rolls at least every two years. DOR then creates a report on each assessment roll. Included in the report is DOR's confidence level in the property appraiser's rolls based on DOR's use of various statistical and analytical measures, which are also included in the

report. DOR is required to forward this report to the "Senate Finance, Taxation, and Claims Committee, the House Finance and Taxation Committee," and the property appraiser. Once DOR presents the property appraiser with its report, the report becomes a public record.

This bill changes the reference to the Legislative committees to, "the committees of the Senate and the House of Representatives with oversight responsibilities for taxation." The bill also requires DOR to notify the chairperson of the appropriate county commission, or the corresponding official under a consolidated charter, that its report is available at their request. When a written request from the chairperson, or corresponding official, is received by DOR, DOR must provide them a copy within 90 days.

If approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect July 1, 2006.
Vote: Senate 40-0; House 117-0

HB 293 — Fiscally Constrained Counties

by Rep. Pickens, Brown, and others (CS/CS/SB 1612 by Ways and Means Committee; Commerce and Consumer Services Committee; and Senators Baker, Aronberg, Argenziano, Alexander, Bennett, Lawson, Peaden, Smith, Lynn, Bullard, King, and Campbell)

This bill provides for the distribution of a portion of the tax on certain communication services (direct-to-home satellite services) to fiscally constrained counties. A "fiscally constrained county" is defined as a county that is entirely within a rural area of critical economic concern as designated by the Governor pursuant to s. 288.0656, F.S., or a county in which a one mill property tax rate will raise no more than $5 million in revenue annually. Based on 2006 taxable value estimates, 30 counties qualify as a fiscally constrained county under this provision. Funds will be distributed by the Department of Revenue using a formula that factors in both the revenue raising potential of one mill, measured on a per capita basis, and a local-effort factor based on the county-wide operating millage levied by each county. Counties may use the distributions for any public purpose other than to pay debt service on any form of indebtedness. Distributions to counties that cease to qualify as a "fiscally constrained county" will be phased-out over a two-year period.

This bill also changes the criteria by which a county currently qualifies for an additional distribution of sales tax revenues under s. 218.65, F.S., by eliminating criteria under which a county with a population over 65,000 could continue to qualify for a distribution. The bill provides for a two-year phase out of the distribution to a county which grows beyond the population cap.

The bill provides for state funds to be used to cover the costs of juvenile detention in fiscally constrained counties.

Finally, this bill reduces general revenue funds by a designated percentage and increases the revenues of fiscally constrained counties by the same amount.

If approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect July 1, 2006.
Vote: Senate 39-0; House 85-27

HB 1269 — Local Occupational License Taxes

by Rep. Cusack and others (CS/SB 2218 by Regulated Industries Committee and Senators Lawson, Bennett, Jones, Aronberg, and King)

This bill changes the name of the Act from the "Local Occupational License Tax Act" to the "Local Business Tax Act," and conforms the name change throughout the Act.

The bill also defines "receipt" to mean the document that is issued by the local governing authority which bears the words "Local Business Tax Receipt" and evidences that the person in whose name the document is issued has complied with the provisions of the Local Business Tax Act. The bill amends ch. 205, F.S., to provide that persons who pay occupational business taxes receive a "receipt" for payment rather than a "certificate." The bill specifies that "changing the name of the item issued by local governments from occupational license tax to local business tax may eliminate some fraudulent misrepresentations."

If approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect January 1, 2007.
Vote: Senate 40-0; House 119-0

HB 1583 — Community Redevelopment

by Rep. M. Davis (CS/CS/SB 2364 by Government Efficiency Appropriations Committee; Community Affairs Committee; and Senator Baker)

The bill provides for additional procedures prior to the adoption of a community redevelopment plan for a community redevelopment agency (CRA) in a non-charter county that has not authorized a study to consider whether a finding of necessity resolution should be adopted by June 5, 2006, has not adopted a finding-of-necessity resolution by March 31, 2007, or has not adopted a community redevelopment plan by June 7, 2007. These additional procedures also apply to a CRA in a non-charter county that modifies its redevelopment plan after October 1, 2006, to expand the boundaries of the redevelopment area.

This bill also provides limitations under certain circumstances on the required contributions of the increase in increment revenues by the taxing authority in the CRAs specified above. Notwithstanding these limitations, an area reinvestment agreement would require the increase in the contribution to continue for a specified area and be used to fund specified public and private projects and services. The agreement must specify the estimated amount to complete the project or provide the services. The increase in the contribution that is required under an area

reinvestment agreement shall cease when the amount specified in the agreement has been invested.

In addition, the bill provides that alternative provisions contained in an interlocal agreement between a taxing authority and the governing body that created the CRA may supersede the provisions of this section with respect to the taxing authority. Finally, the bill requires a charter county to use registered mail to request additional documentation or information from a municipality when considering a request to delegate the powers of the CRA to a municipality and provides the timeframe within which the county must take action on the request.

If approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect July 1, 2006.
Vote: Senate 38-0; House 120-0

HB 7183 — Tax Exemption/Biblical Display

by Finance and Tax Committee and Rep. Brummer and others (SB 2676 by Senators Webster and Posey)

Article VII, section (3)(a), of the Florida Constitution authorizes the Legislature to provide an exemption from ad valorem taxes for property used predominately for religious purposes. This bill specifies that properties are exempt from ad valorem taxation if the property is owned by an entity exempt under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code and is used to:

- Exhibit, illustrate, and interpret biblical manuscripts, codices, stone tablets, and other biblical archives;
- Provide live or recorded demonstrations, explanations, reenactments, and illustrations of biblical history and biblical worship; and
- Exhibit times, places, and events of biblical history and significance.

Properties meeting this criteria must also be open to the public free of charge at least one day each year (subject to capacity limits), and have documentation from the Internal Revenue Service that the property is used for activities which do not endanger its status as an exempt entity.

If approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect July 1, 2006.
Vote: Senate 28-10; House 93-25

GROWTH MANAGEMENT

CS/CS/SB 980 — Electric Transmission and Distribution

by Communications and Public Utilities Committee; Community Affairs Committee; and Senator Alexander

The bill provides that electrical substations are a permittable land use in all land use categories and zoning districts, with specified exceptions. A local government may adopt reasonable standards for setback and landscape buffers, but if a local government does not do so, the standards set forth in the bill apply. The bill creates a process for siting a new distribution electric substation if the local government has adopted standards for setback and landscape buffers and provides timeframes for the process. If an application for a permit is not timely disposed of, it is deemed automatically approved.

Prior to submitting an application for a new distribution electric substation in a residential area, the utility is to consult the local government regarding site selection. The utility is to provide information on the proposed site and as many as three alternative sites. If the local government and the utility are unable to agree upon a site, selection is to be submitted to mediation.

Also, local governments may not require a permit or other approval for vegetation management and tree trimming within an established right-of-way for an electric transmission or distribution line. At the request of a local government, utility companies are required to meet with the local government to discuss and submit the utility's vegetation maintenance plan. The bill requires a utility to give the local government advance notice before conducting vegetation-maintenance and tree trimming or pruning activities in an established right-of-way, specifies standards for such activities, and limits the types of trees or vegetation that may be planted in an established right-of-way for an electric utility.

Finally, the bill requires an electric utility to provide the applicable regional planning council with an annual report on the utility's 5-year plans for siting electric substations and this information is to be included in the regional planning council's annual report.

If approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect upon becoming law.
Vote: Senate 40-0; House 114-5

HB 683 — Growth Management

by Rep. Traviesa and others (CS/CS/SB 1020 by Environmental Preservation Committee; Community Affairs Committee; and Senator Bennett)

This bill allows a separate legal or administrative entity that administers an interlocal agreement under s. 163.01(7), F.S., for which the parties are located in multiple counties, to file the

agreement and any amendments thereto with the clerk of the circuit court in the county where the legal or administrative entity maintains its principal place of business.

The bill encourages a local government that has a coastal management element in its comprehensive plan to adopt recreational surface water use policies. These policies should include criteria for and consider factors such as natural resources, manatee protection needs, protection of working waterfronts and public access, and recreation and economic demands. The criteria for manatee protection should reflect the applicable guidance in the Boat Facility Siting Guide prepared by the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. If a local government elects to adopt recreational surface water policies into its comprehensive plan, the plan amendment is exempt from the limitation on the frequency of amendments. The bill also provides that local governments adopting recreational surface water policies may be eligible for assistance with the development of such policies through the Florida Coastal Management Program. The Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability is required to submit a report on the adoption of recreational surface water policies to the Legislature by December 1, 2010.

Under this bill, a local ordinance designating the type and location of working waterfront properties eligible for tax deferrals must also designate the percentage or amount of the deferral. Also, public lodging establishments are to be included as eligible for tax deferrals and the ordinance must specify which type of public lodging.

This bill allows a property owner having real property located within the boundaries of a community development district (CDD) and a special road and bridge district to select the CDD to provide road and drainage improvements to the property. It provides criteria and a process for removing the real property from the special road and bridge district. The governing body of the special road and bridge district is authorized to file a written objection regarding the proposed withdrawal of the property from the district within a specified time period.

The bill creates a dry storage facility permitting program. This program, to be implemented by the Department of Environmental Protection and the water management districts, applies to the construction, alteration, operation, maintenance, abandonment, or removal of a dry storage facility for 10 or more vessels that is functionally associated with a boat launching area. The applicant for a permit must provide reasonable assurance that the secondary impacts from the facility will not cause adverse impacts to wetlands, surface waters, or manatees. The Department of Environmental Protection and the water management districts retain their authority to regulate these secondary impacts as part of other regulated activities under ch. 373, part IV, F.S.

In addition, the bill allows a local government or the developer to request the state land planning agency to make an informal determination as to whether a development of regional impact (DRI) meets the criteria to be “essentially built out.” It replaces the term “termination date” with “buildout date.” It provides additional criteria for a local government to issue a development permit subsequent to the buildout date in the development order. The bill specifies when the single-family portions of a development may be considered essentially built out.

This bill provides additional exemptions from DRI review and increases the percentages and thresholds that trigger DRI review by approximately 10 percent for proposed changes to a previously approved development. It allows for an increase in residential units without going through DRI review if the proposed increase is below the statutory threshold and a specified percentage of those units are dedicated to affordable housing. The bill revises the substantial deviation numerical standards to include certain types of development as eligible for a 100-percent or 50-percent increase in the standards for projects located in specific areas. It makes technical changes to the provision governing an extension of the buildout date.

Also, this bill provides a process for certain changes that otherwise would go through a notice of proposed change. An increase in residential units for a project does not constitute a substantial deviation that requires additional DRI review if all of the units are dedicated to affordable housing and the increase does not exceed 200 percent of the substantial deviation threshold. This bill revises existing statutory exemptions and provides new exemptions from the DRI review process.

The bill provides for a 12-month period during which a local government may negotiate a binding agreement with impacted jurisdictions to address transportation impacts in order to enjoy an exemption from DRI review for projects located within an urban service boundary, a designated urban infill and redevelopment area, or a rural land stewardship area. In the absence of an agreement or at the option of the local government, the DRI review may proceed but will address transportation impacts only. It provides for an increase in the applicable residential development guidelines and standards and the thresholds for substantial deviations for residential development if a specified percentage of those units are dedicated to workforce housing.

Under this bill, the state land planning agency may raise consistency with the local comprehensive plan as part of its appeal to the Florida Land and Water Adjudicatory Commission (FLWAC). However, if a challenge is filed under s. 163.3215, F.S., then the state land planning agency must intervene in that pending proceeding and raise its consistency issues within 30 days after being served with notice of the challenge. Also, the state land planning agency must dismiss the consistency issues from its development-order appeal to FLWAC.

The process for abandoning a DRI development order is amended to require a local government to rescind a DRI at the request of the developer or landowner if all the required mitigation has been completed proportionate to the amount of development existing on the proposed date of rescission. Finally, the bill also provides for a limitation to an existing exemption for the construction of private docks and seawalls in artificially created waterways.

If approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect July 1, 2006.
Vote: Senate 38-0; House 111-6

CS/CS/SB 1112 — Development Permits/Denial

by Governmental Oversight and Productivity Committee; Community Affairs Committee; and Senator Bennett

This bill requires a local government to provide an applicant with written notice of the denial of an application for a development permit. The notice must include a citation to the applicable portions of an ordinance, rule, statute, or other legal authority for the denial of the permit. The bill defines the term "development permit."

If approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect October 1, 2006.
Vote: Senate 39-0; House 118-0

CS/SB 1194 — Growth Management

by Governmental Oversight and Productivity Committee and Senator Constantine

The bill creates the "Interlocal Service Boundary Agreement Act" as part II of ch. 171, F.S., to provide an alternative process for annexation that allows counties and municipalities to negotiate in good faith to identify municipal service areas and unincorporated service areas, resolve which local government is responsible for providing services and facilities within the municipal service areas, and reduce the number of enclaves. The negotiating parties, however, are not required to reach an agreement.

This bill defines "invited local government" to mean an invited county or municipality, or special district and any other local government designated as such in an initiating resolution or a responding resolution that invites the local government to participate in the negotiation of an interlocal service boundary agreement." The bill also defines a "municipal service area" as an unincorporated area that has been identified by a municipality that is party to the agreement as an area to be annexed or to receive municipal services from a municipality or its designee. Land within a municipal service area may be annexed by a municipality if consent is obtained using a process for annexation consistent with part I of ch. 171, F.S., or a flexible process, as determined by the agreement, that includes one or more of the following:

- Petition for annexation signed by more than 50 percent of the registered voters in the area proposed for annexation;
- Petition for annexation signed by more than 50 percent of the property owners in the area proposed for annexation; or
- Approval by a majority of the registered voters in the area proposed for annexation.

Under this bill, an enclave consisting of 20 acres or more within a designated municipal service area may be annexed if the consent requirements of part I of ch. 171, F.S., are met, one or more of the provisions for annexing land within a municipal service area are met, or the municipality

receives a petition from one or more property owners who own real property in excess of 50 percent of the total real property in the area proposed for annexation. Enclaves consisting of less than 20 acres and with fewer than 100 registered voters, within a designated municipal service area, may be annexed using a flexible process for securing the consent of the voters, as provided in the interlocal service boundary agreement. No voter approval is required.

In addition, this bill codifies certain provisions relating to the imposition of impact fees by local governments. It provides legislative findings and intent relating to the adoption of a local ordinance levying an impact fee. The bill stipulates that such an ordinance must, at a minimum:

- Require that the calculation of the impact fee be based on the most recent and localized data;
- Provide for accounting and reporting of impact fee collections and expenditures;
- Limit administrative charges for the collection of impact fees to actual costs; and
- Require that notice be provided at least 90 days before the effective date of a new or amended impact fee.

This bill also requires that audits of financial statements of local governments and school districts include an affidavit signed by the chief financial officer of the local government or school board stating that the entity has complied with s. 163.31801, F.S., relating to impact fee ordinances.

If approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect upon becoming law.
Vote: Senate 38-0; House 117-0

HB 1299 — Areas of Critical State Concern

by Rep. Sorensen and others (CS/SB 2098 by Environmental Preservation Committee and Senator Bennett)

This bill provides that an area designated as an area of critical state concern (ACSC) for at least 20 consecutive years before the removal of the designation has:

- The authority to continue to levy the tourist impact tax after removal of the designation;
- The authority to continue to use up to 10 percent of the tourist impact tax proceeds for a public purpose other than for infrastructure purposes after the removal of the designation;
- The authority to continue the exercise of all powers granted to its land authority under ch. 380, F.S., until terminated by the governing board;
- The authority to enact an ordinance that requires connection to a central sewerage system within 30 days of notice of the availability of services; and

- The exercise of its land authority powers to acquire real property in the area that was an ACSC for at least 20 consecutive years before the removal of the designation.

This bill also provides a new process for the removal of the designation as an ACSC for the Florida Keys. Between July 12, 2008 and August 30, 2008, the state land planning agency is required to submit a written report to the Administration Commission (Governor and Cabinet) detailing the progress of the Florida Keys towards accomplishing the tasks in the 10-year work program. The report shall also contain a recommendation as to whether substantial progress is being made towards completing those tasks. After receiving the report, the Administration Commission shall determine, before October 1, 2008, whether the Florida Keys have made substantial progress towards completing the required tasks.

The designation of the Florida Keys as an ACSC is removed on October 1, 2009, unless the Administration Commission finds that substantial progress on the work plan has not been achieved. If the designation is removed, the Administration Commission must begin rulemaking within 60 days, pursuant to chapter 120, F.S., to repeal any rules relating to the designation. If the designation of ACSC is not removed from the Florida Keys, the Administration Commission must submit a written report to the Monroe County Commission detailing the tasks under the work program that must be accomplished to achieve substantial progress within the next 12 months. Also, if the designation is not removed on October 1, 2009, the state land planning agency must submit an annual report describing the progress of the Florida Keys Area toward accomplishing remaining tasks under the work program and whether substantial progress has been achieved.

The bill revises the scope of a land authority's powers with respect to the income level for affordable housing. It provides the state is liable in certain inverse condemnation proceedings in Monroe County that are based on land use regulations adopted in response to instructions or rule of the Administration Commission.

If approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect July 1, 2006.
Vote: Senate 39-0; House 92-26

PUBLIC RECORD EXEMPTIONS

HB 7009 — Local Government Managers/OGSR

by Governmental Operations and Rep. Rivera (CS/SB 662 by Governmental Oversight and Productivity Committee and Community Affairs Committee)

This bill reenacts and amends s. 119.071(4)(d)2., F.S., to continue the public records exemption for personal identifying information concerning human resource directors and managers. The bill narrows the exemption by eliminating social security numbers from the exemption as those

numbers are protected by the general exemption for social security numbers. Additionally, certain family information that is not collected by agencies, specifically photographs of children and spouses, is deleted from the exemption.

If approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect October 1, 2006.
Vote: Senate 39-0; House 85-32

HB 7011 — Code Enforcement Officers/OGSR

by Governmental Operations and Rep. Rivera (CS/SB 664 by Governmental Oversight and Productivity Committee and Community Affairs Committee)

This bill reenacts and amends s. 119.071(4)(d)5., F.S., to continue the public records exemption for personal identifying information concerning code enforcement officers. The bill narrows the exemption by eliminating social security numbers from the exemption as those numbers are protected by the general exemption for social security numbers. Additionally, certain family information not collected by agencies, specifically photographs of children and spouses, are deleted from the exemption.

If approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect October 1, 2006.
Vote: Senate 39-0; House 98-19

MISCELLANEOUS

HJR 1569 — Eminent Domain

by Rep. Rubio and others (SJR 626 by Senators Saunders, Haridopolos, Bennett, Baker, Alexander, Atwater, Wise, King, Diaz de la Portilla, Posey, Fasano, Bullard, and Campbell)

This joint resolution proposes to amend the State Constitution to limit the conveyance of private property taken by eminent domain to a natural person or private entity. The limitation on conveyance applies prospectively to property taken by eminent domain if the property was taken pursuant to a petition of taking filed on or after January 2, 2007. The Legislature may provide exceptions to this limitation if passed by a three-fifths vote of the membership of each house. This proposed amendment shall be submitted to the electors of the state for approval or rejection at the next general election or at an earlier special election specifically authorized by law for that purpose.

Vote: Senate 38-2; House 115-0

HB 661 — Coordinated 311 Nonemergency System

by Rep. Arza and others (CS/SB 1062 by Transportation and Economic Development Appropriations Committee and Senator Diaz de la Portilla)

This bill establishes a matching grant program within the Department of Community Affairs to assist local governments in the implementation and operation of "311 nonemergency and other government services telephone systems." The bill specifies certain application criteria, establishes an administrative process, requires a $1 for $1 local match, and authorizes the department to adopt rules to administer the program. Funding to support the matching grant program is contingent upon an appropriation in law or upon receipt of funds from private sources.

If approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect July 1, 2006.
Vote: Senate 39-0; House 112-0

HB 749 — Sewage Treatment and Disposal Systems

by Rep. Bowen and others (CS/CS/SB 1874 Health Care Committee; Community Affairs Committee; and Senator Argenziano)

The bill requires each county water and sewer district and local government proposing to extend or build new central sewerage facilities to prepare a study that includes certain information. The study must include:

- Information from the Department of Health (DOH) on the history of onsite systems currently in use in the area;
- A comparison of the cost to the average property owner of connecting to the centralized system versus installing, operating, and properly maintaining an onsite system that is approved by DOH and offers comparable health and environmental protection;
- Consideration of the local authority's obligations or reasonably anticipated obligations for waterbody cleanup and protection under state or federal programs; and
- Other factors determined appropriate for the study.

This bill allows local governments to satisfy growth management concurrency requirements for sanitary sewer facilities for new development with onsite sewage treatment and disposal systems approved by the DOH. It also allows a local government or water and sewer district responsible for the operation of a centralized sewage system to grant a variance to the owner of a performance-based onsite sewage treatment and disposal system permitted by DOH from mandatory connection to a central sewerage system, as long as the system is functioning properly. A local government or water and sewage district is not required to grant the variance. Local governments are not required to issue a variance under any circumstances in certain areas.

The bill allows DOH or its agent to issue an order requiring the owner of an onsite sewage treatment and disposal system that is in improper condition to repair or replace the system and increases the number of continuing education credits necessary for septic tank contractors and master septic tank contractors.

If approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect July 1, 2006.
Vote: Senate 40-0; House 117-0

HB 7031 — Department of State

by Tourism Committee and Rep. Detert (CS/CS/SB 2384 by Transportation and Economic Development Appropriations Committee; Government Efficiency Appropriations Committee; and Senator Dockery)

This bill addresses the standards for accessible voting systems. Specifically, it allows an audio ballot system to meet certification requirements under s. 101.56062, F.S., either through the voting device or the entire voting system.

The bill provides that persons appointed to the Florida Arts Council shall begin their terms on January 1 of the year of appointment. It removes an audit requirement to conform to Single Audit Act requirements. The bill amends language governing cultural endowments to revise conditions for the return of the state portion of the endowment. The bill revises report and meeting dates for the Discovery of Florida Quincentennial Commemoration Commission.

The bill also transfers to the Legislature the responsibilities relating to restoration of the Florida Historic Capitol that are currently under the Department of State. The bill ensures that the Florida Historic Capitol shall be maintained in accordance with good historic preservation practices that are specified in the National Park Service Preservation Briefs and the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings. The responsibilities of the Florida Historic Capitol Curator are transferred to the Legislature from the Department of State.

Additionally, the bill corrects a cross reference in s. 607.193, F.S., related to supplemental corporate fees. State agencies are required to submit an annual list of all published documents that meet the definition of "public document" under s. 257.05, F.S., to the State Library. The bill clarifies the types of documents that are subject to the written justification requirement for publications with costs exceeding $50,000. Finally, this bill requires agencies, in conducting biennial mailing list purges, to provide recipients with the option of receiving publications electronically in lieu of hard copies.

If approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect July 1, 2006.
Vote: Senate 40-0; House 116-0

BUILDING SAFETY

CS/CS/SB 1774 — Building Codes

by Regulated Industries Committee; Community Affairs Committee; and Senator Constantine

Florida Building Code – Wind-Design Standards

The bill authorizes the Florida Building Commission to amend the wind design standards contained in the Florida Building Code subject to the amendatory requirements contained in s. 553.73, F.S. In addition, the bill specifically authorizes the commission to identify within the code those areas of the state from the eastern border of Franklin County to the Florida-Alabama line (the Panhandle region) that are subject to the windborne debris requirements of the code. The commission's initial designation of windlines for this region must address the results of the Florida Panhandle Windborne Debris Region study and is only subject to the rule adoption procedures contained in ch. 120, F.S. The bill stipulates that new windborne debris requirements for the Panhandle region may not take effect for six months following completion of rule-making or May 31, 2007, whichever is sooner. This authorization expressly supersedes the limitations contained in section 109 of ch. 2000-141, L.O.F.

The bill would allow the commission to eliminate or revise the existing "Panhandle exception" (limiting wind-borne debris requirements to within 1 mile of the coast) and amend the wind design standards applicable to the Panhandle region to incorporate the current edition of the national model building code engineering standard (American Society of Civil Engineers Standard 7, 2002 Edition). This would subject new construction in the Panhandle region to the same windborne debris requirements (enhanced door and window protection) applicable to other areas of the state. The bill also authorizes the commission to utilize expedited rule-making procedures (ch. 120, F.S., rather than s. 553.73, F.S.) in implementing this provision.

The bill amends s. 553.71, F.S., to delete the current statutory definition of "Exposure category C." This provision would allow the commission to define this category through its code development processes.

Elevator Safety

The bill amends s. 399.15, F.S., to extend from June 30, 2006 to September 30, 2006, the date by which all elevators that allow public access in buildings that are least six stories high, must be keyed to allow operation with a master key in fire emergency situations. This provision applies to buildings on which a building permit has been issued. The bill removes the provision that provides that the requirement applies to buildings upon which construction has begun. The bill

also extends the compliance deadline for existing buildings from July 1, 2007 to October 1, 2009.

Building Code Development and Interpretation

The bill revises the existing code development process to enable the commission to address certain issues through streamlined amendatory procedures. Under this proposal, the commission would be authorized to amend the code subject only to the administrative rule adoption procedures of ch. 120, F.S. (rather than the more time-consuming code development requirements of ch. 553, F.S.). Following Commission approval and publication on the Commission's website, authorities having jurisdiction to enforce the code would be authorized to enforce the amendments. The bill specifies that the Commission may use this expedited process for amendments that are needed to address:

- Conflicts within the updated code;
- Conflicts between the updated code and the Florida Fire Prevention Code;
- The omission of Florida-specific amendments that were previously adopted in the code if the omission is not supported by a specific recommendation of a technical advisory or a particular action by the commission; or
- Unintended results from the integration of Florida-specific amendments that were previously adopted by the model code.

The bill amends s. 553.775, F.S., to restrict interpretations of the Florida Accessibility Code for Building Construction. Based on the historical practice and present concerns of advocates for the disabled, the commission has recommended restricting interpretation of the accessibility provisions.

The bill amends s. 553.791, F.S., to provide that after construction has commenced and if the local building official is unable to provide inspection services in a timely manner, the building owner or his or her contractor may elect to use a private provider for building inspection services. The owner or contractor must notify the local building official of their intention to use a private provider at least seven business days prior to the next scheduled inspection and must comply with existing notice requirements.

Fire Prevention Code and Firesafety Equipment

The bill amends s. 633.0215, F.S., to revise the existing Florida Fire Prevention Code development process to enable the State Fire Marshal to amend the Florida Fire Prevention Code through a streamlined amendatory procedure. The bill authorizes the State Fire Marshal to amend the Fire Prevention Code subject only to the rule adoption procedures of ch. 120, F.S. (rather than the requirements of ch. 633, F.S.). Following State Fire Marshal approval and publication

on the State Fire Marshal's website, authorities having jurisdiction to enforce the Florida Fire Prevention Code would be authorized to enforce the amendments. The bill specifies that the State Fire Marshal may use this expedited process for amendments that are needed to address:

- Conflicts within the updated Florida Fire Prevention Code;
- Conflicts between the updated Florida Fire Prevention Code and the Florida Building Code;
- The omission of Florida-specific amendments that were previously adopted in the Florida Fire Prevention Code if the omission is not supported by a specific recommendation of a technical advisory or a particular action by the commission; or
- Unintended results from the integration of Florida-specific amendments that were previously adopted by the model code.

The bill amends s. 633.021, F.S., to define the term "fire hydrant" to mean: a connection to a water main, elevated water tank, or other source of water for the purpose of supplying water to a fire hose or other fire protection apparatus for fire-suppression operations.

The bill amends s. 633.082, F.S., to require the inspection of fire hydrants installed in public and private properties, except one-family or two-family dwellings. The inspection must follow the nationally recognized inspection, testing, and maintenance standards. The inspector must provide a copy of the inspection report to the hydrant owner and the local authority having jurisdiction. The bill clarifies that the maintenance of fire hydrant and fire protection systems and any corrective actions required are the responsibility of the owner of the system or hydrant. Current law does not reference the fire hydrant.

The bill requires that each fire hydrant must be opened fully each year for at least one minute for the purpose of clearing all foreign materials from the hydrant. It also requires that fire hydrants that have been made nonfunctional by the closing of the water supply valve must be immediately tagged with a red tag that is boldly marked "nonfunctional." The local fire authority must be notified that the hydrant is nonfunctional.

Finally, the bill repeals s. 633.5391, F.S., which requires that fire hydrant backflow prevention assemblies must be inspected once every three years.

If approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect July 1, 2006.
Vote: Senate 39-0; House 119-1

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

HB 1363 — Affordable Housing

by Rep. M. Davis and others (CS/CS/SB 132 by Transportation and Economic Development Appropriations Committee; Community Affairs Committee; and Senators Bennett, Clary, Fasano, Smith, Atwater, and Klein)

This bill implements numerous revisions to Florida's affordable housing programs, and addresses a number of related land use and regulatory issues. The major provisions of the bill are summarized below.

Use of Surplus Lands for Affordable Housing

The bill requires each county and municipality to prepare an inventory list of all real property held in fee simple by the county within its jurisdiction. The list is to be prepared by July 1, 2007, and each three years thereafter. The bill requires the county governing body to review the list at a public hearing and provides that it may be revised at the conclusion of the meeting. The governing body must adopt a resolution that includes the inventory following the meeting. Properties identified as appropriate for affordable housing may be offered for sale and the proceeds may be used to:

- Purchase land for the development of affordable housing;
- Increase the local government fund earmarked for affordable housing;
- May be sold with a restriction that requires the development of the property as permanent affordable housing; or
- May be donated to a nonprofit housing organization for the construction of permanent affordable housing.

The bill also amends existing law related to the surplus state lands by providing that a local government may request that state lands be specifically declared surplus lands for the purpose of providing affordable housing. Additionally, the bill authorizes affordable housing as a permitted use for surplus state lands; and provides that when such lands are conveyed to local governments, they must be disposed of consistent with the provisions outlined above.

Housing Assistance for Special District and School District Personnel

The bill authorizes certain independent special districts to provide specific types of housing assistance. The bill authorizes Community Development Districts created pursuant to ch. 190, F.S., to provide housing and housing assistance for employed personnel whose total annual household income does not exceed 140 percent of the area median income (AMI), adjusted for family size. Similarly, the bill authorizes any independent special district created pursuant to

ch. 189, F.S., and drainage and water control districts created pursuant to ch. 298, F.S., to provide housing and housing assistance for its employed personnel whose total annual household income does not exceed 140 percent of the AMI, adjusted for family size.

The bill amends s. 1001.42, F.S., to provide that certain school board lands (surplus lands and lands deemed not usable for purposes of location or other factors) may be used for housing for teachers and other other school district personnel independently or in conjunction with other agencies.

Deferral of Ad Valorem Taxes

The bill amends s. 197.252, F.S., to revise eligibility requirements governing the homestead tax deferral program. The tax deferral program allows qualifying homestead property owners to defer ad valorem and non-ad valorem assessments until there is change in the ownership or use of the property, at which time the deferred taxes, assessments, and interests are due and payable. The bill revises program eligibility requirements to decrease the age limit (from 70 to 65) and increase the income threshold (from $12,000 to $23,460). The bill also reduces the maximum interest rate that may be charged on deferred property taxes from 9.5 to 7 percent.

Disabled Veterans License and Permit Fee Exemption

Section 295.16, F.S., allows veterans to be exempt from paying building license or permit fees to any county or municipality for wheelchair accessibility improvements made upon a mobile home, when certain criteria are met. The bill increases the type of residences eligible for the permit fee exemption in s. 295.16, F.S to include any dwelling they own. This change will enable a larger population of eligible, disabled veterans to take advantage of the existing fee exemption, reducing the costs that they are obligated to pay in order to make their homes wheelchair accessible.

Developments of Regional Impact (DRI)

Existing law provides that any proposed change to an approved DRI that exceeds statutory thresholds, known as a substantial deviation, must undergo additional DRI review. The bill provides a residential density bonus to increase the density threshold by the greater of 50 percent or 200 units when 15 percent of the increase in the number of dwelling units is dedicated to the construction of workforce housing subject to a recorded land use restriction that shall be for a period of at least 20 years and that includes resale provisions to ensure long-term affordability for income-eligible homeowners and renters and provisions for the workforce housing to be commenced prior to the completion of 50 percent of the market rate dwelling. The bill defines "affordable workforce housing" for purposes of this provision as housing that is affordable to a person who earns less than 120 percent of the AMI or less than 140 percent of the AMI if located in a county in which the median purchase price for a single-family existing home exceeds the statewide median purchase price of a single-family existing home.

Additionally, an increase in the number of residential dwelling units does not constitute a substantial deviation and is not subject to DRI review for additional impacts if all the residential dwelling units are dedicated to affordable workforce housing for a period of at least 20 years which includes resale provisions to ensure long-term affordability for income-eligible homeowners and renters. For these purposes, affordable workforce housing is defined as housing that is affordable to a person who earns less than 120 percent of the AMI, or less than 140 percent of the AMI is located in a county in which the median purchase price for a single—family existing home exceeds the statewide median purchase price of a single-family existing home.

Existing law provides statewide guidelines and standards for development required to undergo DRI review. The bill provides a residential density bonus of 50 percent where a developer demonstrates that at least 15 percent of the total residential dwelling units will be dedicated to affordable workforce housing subject to a recorded land use restriction for no less than 20 years and that includes resale provisions to ensure long-term affordability for income-eligible homeowners and renters and provisions for the workforce housing to be commenced prior to the completion of 50 percent of the market rate dwelling.

Density Incentives for Land Donation

The bill creates density bonus incentives for land donations for affordable housing purposes for extremely-low-income, very-low-income, low-income or moderate-income persons. A local government may provide density bonus incentives to any landowner who voluntarily donates fee simple interest in real property to the local government for affordable housing purposes. The authorized bonus may provide one to four dwelling units per gross acre of donated land. The density bonus would be applied to any land within the local government's jurisdiction as long as residential is an allowable use on the receiving land and that the overall density of the receiving land does not exceed six units per gross acre. The award of density bonus, identification of the receiving land and any other conditions are subject to local government approval.

State Housing Initiatives Partnership (SHIP)

The bill amends the SHIP program to provide that each local housing assistance plan must include a definition of essential service personnel for county or eligible municipality. The bill encourages eligible local governments to develop a strategy within its local housing assistance plan that emphasizes recruitment and retention of essential service personnel, and requires local government to verify compliance with the eligibility criteria. Additionally, the bill includes the following provisions:

- Encourages eligible local governments to develop a strategy within in its local housing assistance plan that addresses the needs of persons who are deprived of affordable

housing due to closure of a mobile home park or conversion of affordable rental units to condominiums.

- Provides that 65 percent of the funds of each eligible local government's local housing distribution be reserved for rehabilitation and construction of home ownership units for eligible extremely-low-income, low-income or very-low-income persons.
- Authorizes the alternative use of U.S. Department of the Treasury established data and standards for determining the time period for calculating the average area purchase price relative to fund awards under the program.

Definition for Extremely-Low-Income

The bill defines "extremely-low-income" to mean one or more natural persons or a family whose total annual household income does not exceed 30 percent of the median annual adjusted gross income for households with the state. The bill authorizes the Florida Housing Finance Corporation to adjust this amount annually by rule to provide that in lower income counties the definition may exceed 30 percent of the AMI and that in higher income counties; extremely-low-income may be less than 30 percent of AMI. As noted below in the discussion of changes to the State Apartment Incentive Loan program, several programmatic changes are made to allow this program to serve extremely-low-income persons.

State Apartment Incentive Loan Program (SAIL)

The bill amends the SAIL program to authorize the Corporation to set a SAIL loan interest rate at between 0 to 3 percent based on the pro rata share of units set aside for homeless residents if the total of such units is less than 80 percent of the total units. The bill authorizes the Corporation to make loans exceeding 25 percent of project costs when the project serves extremely-low-income persons and forgive indebtedness for a share of the loan attributable to the units in a project reserved for extremely-low-income persons. Similarly, the Corporation is authorized to waive a requirement related to the maximum amount of a loan under certain conditions for projects which reserve units for extremely-low-income person and allows rent controls when the sponsor has committed to set aside units for extremely-low-income persons.

The bill lowers the matching commitment of a sponsor of an elderly housing community to at least 5 percent (from at least 15 percent) and authorizes the Corporation to make the term of its encumbrance coterminous with the longest term of superior loans. The bill amends the SAIL competitive ranking criteria as follows:

- Provides ranking credit to projects that reserve units for extremely-low-income persons, and

- Provides an exclusion from the program ranking criteria that favors the lowest project loan/cost ratio for that share of the loan attributable to units serving extremely-low-income persons.

Florida Homeownership Assistance Program (HAP)

The bill expands the scope of the HAP program to moderate-income persons in purchasing a primary residence. It increases the income level for eligible person to 120 percent from 80 percent of the greater of the state or local median income, and provides that loans may not exceed the lesser of 35 percent (previously 25 percent) of the purchase price or the amount necessary to enable the purchaser to meet credit underwriting criteria. The bill also deletes a loan preference for community development corporations as defined in s. 290.033, F.S., and removes the temporal reservation of certain funds.

Additionally, the bill amends the HAP program to authorize the Corporation to waive the repayment of loans on the sale, transfer, refinancing, or rental of secured property. The Corporation is empowered to establish subsidiary business entities, and to provide such subsidiary entities with rulemaking authority necessary to carry out the purposes of taking title to and managing and disposing of property acquired by the Corporation.

Community Workforce Housing Innovation Pilot Program (CWHIPP)

The bill creates a new pilot program for the purpose of providing affordable rental and home ownership opportunities for essential services personnel with medium incomes in high-cost and high-growth counties. The program is designed to use regulatory incentives and state and local funds to promote local public-private partnerships and to leverage government and private sources.

Program Administration - The bill provides the Corporation with authority to provide CWHIPP loans to an applicant for construction or rehabilitation of workforce housing in eligible areas. The Corporation is directed to establish a funding process and selection criteria by rule or by request for proposals. The funding appropriated for this pilot program is intended to be used with other public and private sector resources. The Corporation is directed to provide incentives for local governments in eligible areas to use local affordable housing funds to assist in meeting the affordable housing needs of persons eligible under the program.

Key Definitions - The term “workforce housing” is defined as housing affordable to natural persons or families whose total annual household income does not exceed 140 percent of the AMI, adjusted for household size or a higher area median income in areas of critical state concern or 150 percent of AMI, adjusted for family size, in areas of critical state concern designated under s. 380.05, F.S., for which the Legislature has declared its intent to provide affordable housing and areas that were designated as areas of critical state concern for at least 20 consecutive years prior to removal of the designation. “Essential services personnel” is defined

as persons in need of affordable housing who are employed in occupations or professions in which they are considered essential service personnel as defined in that area's local housing assistance plan as provided for in the SHIP program.

Priority Funding Consideration - The bill provides the program shall provide priority funding consideration to projects in counties where the disparity between the area median income and the median sales price for a single family home is greatest. The Corporation is authorized to fund projects in counties where innovative regulatory and financial incentives are made available. Priority funding consideration shall be given where:

- The local jurisdiction establishes appropriate regulatory incentives;
- Projects are innovative, and include new construction or rehabilitation, mixed-income housing, or commercial and housing mixed-use elements, and those that promote homeownership; and
- Projects that set aside at least 80 percent of units for workforce housing and at least 50 percent for essential services personnel and for projects that require the least amount of program funding compared to the overall housing costs for the project.

Grant Eligibility - For home ownership units, applications must limit the sales price of a detached unit, town home, or condominium unit to not more than 80 percent of the higher of the median sales price for that type of unit in that county, or the statewide median sales price for that type of unit. Applicants must require that all eligible purchasers of home ownership units occupy the homes as their primary residence. For rental units, applicants must restrict rents for all workforce housing serving those with incomes at or below 120 percent of the AMI at the appropriate income level using the restricted rents for the federal low-income housing tax credit program. For workforce housing units serving those with incomes above 120 percent of AMI, applicants must restrict rents to those established by the Corporation, not to exceed 30 percent of the maximum household income adjusted to unit size. In addition, program applicants must:

- Demonstrate that the applicant is a public-private partnership.
- Have grants, donations of land or contributions from the public-private partnership or other sources collectively totaling at least 15 percent of the total development cost.
- Demonstrate how the applicant will use the regulatory incentives and financial strategies outlined above.
- Demonstrate that the applicant possesses title to or site control of land and evidences availability of required infrastructure.
- Demonstrate the applicant's affordable housing development and management experience.

- Provide any available research or facts supporting the demand and need for rental or home ownership workforce housing for eligible persons in the market in which the project is proposed.

The bill provides that projects eligible for loans may include certain manufactured housing that includes local contributions or financial strategies.

The bill provides that the Corporation shall award loans with a 1 to 3 percent interest rate which may be forgiven where long-term affordability is provided and where at least 80 percent of the units are set aside for workforce housing and at least 50 percent of the units are set aside for essential services personnel.

Hurricane Housing Recovery

The bill authorizes the Corporation to provide funds to eligible entities for affordable housing recovery in those areas of the state which sustained housing damage due to hurricanes during 2004 and 2005. The Corporation is directed to utilize data provided by the Federal Emergency Management Agency to assist in its allocation of funds to local jurisdictions. Subject to an appropriation, funds are to be provided for the Hurricane Housing Recovery Program, the Farmworker Housing Recovery and the Special Housing Assistance and Development Programs, and the Rental Recovery Loan Program. The Corporation is directed to provide technical and training assistance, and adopt emergency rules pursuant to s. 120.54, F.S.

Funding for Affordable Housing

The bill appropriates more than $271 million for various affordable housing initiatives during FY 2006-2007. Specifically, the bill provides for the following:

- $75.9 million is appropriated from the Local Government Housing Trust Fund for the Rental Recovery Loan Program;
- $15 million is appropriated from the State Housing Trust Fund for the Farmworker Housing Recovery Program and the Special Housing Assistance and Development Program;
- $17 million is appropriated from the State Housing Trust Fund for the Rental Recovery Program;
- $100,000 is appropriated from the State Housing Trust Fund to the Florida Housing Finance Corporation for technical and training assistance;
- $30 million of non-recurring funds is appropriated from the Local Government Housing Trust Fund for the purpose of implementing certain provisions relating to housing for extremely-low-income persons;

- $50 million is appropriated from the State Housing Trust Fund for the purpose of implementing the Community Workforce Housing Innovation Pilot Program; and
- $250,000 of recurring funds and $300,000 of nonrecurring funds is appropriated from the Grants and Donations Trust Fund to the Department of Community Affairs for the purpose of implementing certain provisions relating to the Century Commission for a Sustainable Florida.

If approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect July 1, 2006, except as otherwise provided.
Vote: Senate 39-0; House 111-0

CS/SB 1268 — Deferral of Ad Valorem Taxes

by Community Affairs Committee and Senator Margolis

This bill revises the age and income thresholds governing eligibility for the homestead tax deferral program established in s. 197.252, F.S. Specifically, the bill decreases the minimum age limit from 70 to 65, and increases the household income limitation from $12,000 to $23,463. This income limit matches the threshold amount designated for the additional homestead exemption authorized in s. 196.075, F.S. Additionally, the bill reduces the maximum interest rate that may be charged on deferred property taxes from 9.5 to 7 percent.

The bill will enable a larger population of homestead property owners to elect to defer all or a portion of the combined total of the ad valorem taxes and any non-ad valorem assessments. The maximum interest rate applicable to deferred taxes and assessments would be capped at 7 percent. The deferred taxes and interest would continue to constitute a prior lien on the homestead, and all deferred taxes, assessments, and interests would be due upon a change in the ownership or use of the property.

If approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect July 1, 2006.
Vote: Senate 40-0; House 113-0

HJR 353 — Homestead Exemption Increase

by Rep. Lopez-Cantera and others (SJR 1840 by Senators Haridopolos, Pruitt, Baker, Bennett, Atwater, Fasano, King, and Alexander)

This joint resolution would amend Article VII, Section 6 of the State Constitution, to increase the maximum additional homestead exemption that a county or municipality may grant to low-income seniors from $25,000 to $50,000. It also creates Section 26 of Article XII to provide that this increase in the cap on the additional homestead exemption for low-income seniors takes effect on January 1, 2007. The joint resolution shall be submitted to the electors for approval or rejection at the next general election or at an earlier special election if provided by law.

This provision would take effect January 1, 2007, if approved by the electors of this state at the next general election.
Vote: Senate 38-0; House 119-0

VETERANS AND MILITARY AFFAIRS

HB 7127 — Disturbance of Assemblies

by Military and Veteran Affairs Committee and Rep. Jordan and others (CS/SB 218 by Community Affairs Committee and Senators Bennett, Posey, Crist, Campbell, and Saunders)

This bill establishes a first degree misdemeanor penalty for anyone who willfully interrupts or disturbs an assembly of people who have gathered to acknowledge the death of an individual with a military funeral honors detail. A first degree misdemeanor is punishable by a term of imprisonment not exceeding one year and by a fine not exceeding $1,000.

If approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect upon becoming law.
Vote: Senate 38-0; House 119-0

HJR 631 — Homestead Tax/Disabled Veteran

by Rep. Sansom and others (CS/SJR 194 by Ways and Means Committee and Senators Fasano, Jones, Haridopolos, Wise, Hill, Garcia, Smith, Posey, Baker, Clary, Margolis, Alexander, Peaden, Campbell, Sebesta, Bennett, Atwater, King, Lawson, Argenziano, Miller, Crist, and Klein)

This joint resolution, if approved by the electorate, would allow certain disabled veterans of World War II to receive a discount from the amount of the ad valorem tax otherwise owed on homestead property. In order to qualify for this discount the World War II veteran must demonstrate: (1) he was a Florida resident at the time of entering the military service; (2) the disability was combat-related; and (3) the veteran was honorably discharged upon separation from military service. The discount is in a percentage equal to the percentage of the veteran's permanent, combat-related disability, as determined by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs or its predecessor.

Applicants for this discount are required to submit documentation supporting their eligibility to the county tax appraiser by March 1 of each year. The amendment grants authority to the Legislature to waive the requirement for an annual application. Required documentation includes the following: proof of residency at the time of entering military service; proof that the injury was combat-related; an official letter from the United States Department of Veteran's Affairs stating the percentage of the veteran's permanent disability; and a copy of the veteran's honorable discharge. The joint resolution provides that if the property appraiser denies the

request for a discount, the appraiser must notify the applicant in writing of the reasons for the denial, and the veteran may reapply. If approved, the amendment will take effect December 7, 2006.

These provisions take effect on December 7, 2006 upon approval of the electors of this state at the next general election.
Vote: Senate 37-1; House 116-0

CS/SB 1370 — Veterans' Nursing Home/Admittance

by Domestic Security Committee and Senators Saunders and Lynn

This bill authorizes the Executive Director of the Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs to waive the residency requirement for veterans who are otherwise eligible for admission under Florida law but are not Florida residents. Consideration for such waivers would be limited to evacuees from other states where a state of emergency had been declared by that state's governor. The bill specifies that eligible veterans who are Florida residents will receive first priority for admission.

If approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect July 1, 2006.
Vote: Senate 37-0; House 118-0

CS/SB 2034 — Education/Spouses/Disabled Veterans

by Education Appropriations Committee and Senator Baker

This bill extends certain state-sponsored educational benefits currently available to the children of deceased and disabled veterans to the spouses of such veterans. It establishes eligibility criteria and use restrictions governing this program. The bill also limits the benefits to 110 percent of the required hours for the initial baccalaureate or certificate program in which a spouse is enrolled, and clarifies that the age restrictions in s. 295.02, F.S., do not apply to qualifying spouses.

If approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect July 1, 2006.
Vote: Senate 38-0; House 117-0

HB 573 — Disabled Veterans/Residence

by Rep. Bilirakis and others (CS/SB 1342 by Ways and Means Committee and Senators Bennett, Crist, and Posey)

Currently, certain disabled veterans are exempt from local government building permit fees for wheelchair accessibility improvements upon a mobile home. This bill amends s. 295.16, F.S. to

expand this license and permit fee exemption to include any dwelling owned by the veteran and used as a residence.

If approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect July 1, 2006.
Vote: Senate 38-0; House 118-0