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Preserve pretrial programs

By **SALLY HEYMAN, AND TIFFANY MOORE RUSSELL**

Pretrial programs just make sense, and they work. We all should care about pretrial programs because legislation moving through Tallahassee will gut these programs at taxpayer expense.

Pretrial release programs allow those accused of nonviolent crimes awaiting trial to be released under monitored supervision. It costs taxpayers on average \$75 a day or more to keep someone in jail but only around \$5 a day to put them in a supervised program. If a defendant has to wait 60 days before trial, the math is simple - taxpayers can pay more than \$4,500 to house that defendant or \$300 to place him in a pretrial program.

Law enforcement, state attorneys, public defenders and officers of the court support pretrial programs. But unfortunately, a special interest group in Tallahassee is pushing to gut these programs, and some state legislators are helping them. Pretrial programs were created by local experts working in criminal justice who are committed to your safety and the integrity of our judicial system.

Many people awaiting trial are struggling in this economy, cannot afford to post bond and are left in our jails at taxpayers' expense. Most people who can afford to bond out, do. Don't let a special interest group change a system that works, saves tax dollars and preserves our safety.

This isn't just about money. It is about safety - our safety. Most pretrial programs monitor defendants with electronic devices. Some programs even require ongoing drug testing. In addition, pretrial agencies report their outcomes to the state for monitoring.

Floridians are facing unemployment rates above 11 percent and one of the nation's top home foreclosure rates. Yet some in Tallahassee want to change what works at the expense of Florida's taxpayers.

The bottom line is that those in corrections and our officers of the court see this as a necessary program, and it shouldn't be eliminated because a special interest wants change. Public safety and efficiency should be the change driver, not political expediency.

Call your legislators today and ask them to vote against Senate Bill 1398 or House Bill 1379 and for local taxpayers.

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