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106 North Bronough Street, Tallahassee, FL 32301 floridatxwatch.org o: 850.222.5052 f: 850.222.7476

Senator George S. LeMieux
Chairman of the Board of Trustees

Dominic M. Calabro
President & Chief Executive Officer

**Comments to the Honorable Kelli Stargel, Chair, and Members of the Senate
Appropriations Committee, regarding SB 342 --- Juvenile Diversion Program Expunction**

My name is Dominic M. Calabro and I am President and CEO of Florida TaxWatch, an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit, taxpayer research institute & government watchdog which, for over 42 years, has worked to improve the effectiveness, efficiency, and accountability of Florida government and promote a fair and equitable system of taxation.

Over the years, Florida TaxWatch has conducted significant research in criminal justice and corrections. Our focus has been on changes that, when the public's safety is still served, keep non-violent offenders out of prison and reduce recidivism through methods that encourage education and employment. Such changes can make a huge difference in offenders' lives, save taxpayers the cost of over-incarceration, and ultimately make Florida safer.

[Florida TaxWatch has been a long-time supporter of juvenile pre-arrest diversion programs](#) and SB 342 can make the already proven benefits of these programs longer lasting by not allowing a youthful mistake to keep juvenile offenders from finding gainful employment.

Expanding the number of offenses that qualify for expunction after completing a diversion program will help many more juvenile offenders become productive citizens. Current law allows only those that commit misdemeanors to qualify. The bill also addresses the concern of potentially allowing those that commit violent crimes to take advantage of expunction by excluding juveniles that commit forcible felonies.

The bill also contains the safeguard of keeping the decision to refer a juvenile to a diversion program at the discretion of either the law enforcement officer that confronted the juvenile at the time of the incident or the state attorney that has been referred the case.

Juveniles deserve a second chance and Florida TaxWatch concludes that SB 342 can help them avoid a felony arrest record that can make housing, higher education, and employment extremely difficult.

We commend you and your committee for considering this positive change and look forward to working with you and your colleagues on this and other issues this session. Thank you for your thoughtful consideration and, most of all, thank you and your family for your selfless public service to our state's taxpayers.