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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 HJR 1/HB 1563 --- Homestead Exemption

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 40 years, has worked to improve the effectiveness, efficiency, and accountability of Florida government and promote a fair and equitable system of taxation.

We owe a debt to teachers, law enforcement officers, correctional officers, firefighters, child welfare services professionals, EMTs, paramedics and active-duty military. They are Florida heroes, and this has been especially true during this public health pandemic.

The proposed constitutional amendment and its implementing bill would be a small token of the state's gratitude. It is small relative to their contribution, but the property tax savings they will receive can really make a difference. The average savings for the people in the qualifying occupations will likely be between \$500 and \$600 annually, and for those that live in jurisdictions with higher millage rates, the saving will be greater.

This is not going to solve Florida's workforce housing affordability crisis but anything that reduces housing costs will be welcome by these Floridians, most of which are in occupations that are suffering with workforce housing affordability.

This exemption would not put a significant burden on most local governments. Property values are rising and if locals keep the same millage, they will likely bring in more money. Even if local governing boards adopt the rolled-back rate, the calculation makes up for the lost taxable value. An exception to this is our state's fiscally constrained counties, but the proposal smartly has a provision for the state to make up the lost revenue.

Rewarding people through property tax savings is not a perfect solution. Florida's property tax system already shifts billions of dollars in tax burden from homestead properties to renters and businesses. However, Florida TaxWatch acknowledges that the benefits of this proposed exemption generally outweigh the costs and it is a reasonable way to reward nearly half a million citizens that more than deserve it.

We look forward to working with you and your colleagues on this and other tax 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.