



SHARON R. BOCK

Clerk & Comptroller
Palm Beach County

March 29, 2010

The Honorable Jeff Atwater
Senate President
312 Senate Office Building
Tallahassee, FL 32399

Dear Senate President Atwater:

I am alarmed and disappointed by the action taken by Sen. J.D. Alexander and the Senate Ways & Means Committee on Thursday, March 25, when an amendment was passed that cut the statewide budget for Clerks of Court by \$23 million.

Even more disappointing was that the budget amendment process did not reflect the level of transparency that would be expected under your leadership. The amendment was filed only 37 minutes before the committee meeting began, giving Clerks and other stakeholders no opportunity for review or input.

You are aware that during the 2009 legislative session the Clerks' statewide budget was cut by \$46 million,* forcing the loss of 1300 employees statewide. You acknowledged to Florida's 67 Clerks that the process used to cut the Clerks' budget last year was flawed. You assured the Clerks that you would not let this happen again.

Yet, here we are, in the middle of the 2010 session, just days after another flawed process was used to assault the Clerks' budget.

If SB 2700 passes with its current language, \$2.7 million will be cut from my budget and I will be forced to lay off 100 employees. This, after a budget cut of \$7.1 million dollars last year, and the loss of 101 employees. Overall, this amounts to a 23 percent reduction in staff.

Last year, you stated that you had no idea of the potential impact the budget cut would have on the Clerks. I am committed this year to making sure you know how this will affect your constituents and our justice system, so you can take action before the Senate budget is heard on the floor this week.

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Sharon R. Bock, Esq., Clerk & Comptroller
Palm Beach County

Here's what it will look like if these proposed cuts go through:

- The Palm Beach County Clerk's office will lose 200,000 hours of productivity;
- Branch offices in Belle Glade, Palm Beach Gardens and Delray Beach will close to walk-in customers, driving 324,000 customers to the downtown courthouse;
- 45 percent of the telephone calls to our office will not be answered;
- Customers will wait two to four hours for service in our downtown office.

Access to justice has already been severely compromised in Palm Beach County. Because Clerks are at the front end of the judicial process, their inability to function properly, directly impacts the entire justice system. Further cuts will cause court cases to languish without any foreseeable resolution.

Another consequence of inadequate funding is the adverse economic impact it has on the state, estimated in 2009 by the Washington Economics Group to be \$10.1 billion annually. In Palm Beach County alone, the impact is estimated at \$691 million.

I understood that the Clerks had your support and commitment to adequately fund our offices. I ask that you follow through on that commitment to ensure that justice for your constituents is neither delayed nor denied.

Florida's Clerks of Court support the \$451 million budget originally approved by the Senate Criminal and Civil Justice Appropriations Committee, and agreed to by the House Appropriations Committee.

I trust that you will do the right thing for Floridians and the people of Palm Beach County.

Sincerely,



Sharon R. Bock, Esq.

*Prior to the legislative cuts, Clerks had absorbed a statewide \$42 million budget reduction.

cc: Bud Kneip, Chief of Staff for Senate President Atwater
Florida's Clerks of Court