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Funding nursing homes

## Bad proposal would hurt our elderly

For well over 30 years, Florida's nursing home Medicaid program has told all providers that if the provider was willing to spend money on patient care, then the state would reimburse allowable care costs to reasonable caps.

This reimbursement program has allowed Florida to structure a longterm care system that makes it possible to provide good care at virtually every nursing home. It's not Cadillac care, but it's good care throughout the state.

Our elected leaders declared that the elderly were entitled to adequate care and appropriate support during their last years of life — even those without assets of their own.

It is impossible to talk about a longterm care Medicaid program that costs taxpayers more than \$3.3 billion annually without recognizing that there is a clear public purpose served in caring for Florida's frailest citizens.

But now, some nursing home operators seek to move limited public funds from patient care to corporate profits.

The Florida Health Care Association is calling for an additional \$57 million in new money for nursing homes while concurrently shifting \$44 million of that money from non-property to property payments.

This reckless attempt at corporate welfare is an unconscionable effort by rapacious owners to improve the profitability of their nursing homes. The real effect is to pull the rug out from under the frailest poor in our communities. This is corporate welfare.

The effort to shift dollars from patient care to profits was cleverly crafted under the cover of effecting a Prospective Payment System as part of the Medicaid budget and was temporarily halted by Florida Rep. Jason Brodeur after hearings before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Health.

But the issue is far from resolved, and the legislative session is young.

The current Medicaid program serves taxpayers well and treats nursing homes fairly. While few would argue that nursing home owners shouldn't try to increase profits, those profits should not come from patient care dollars. The well-being of our most frail elders is at stake.

We must be vigilant.

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