

Dear Space Coast Daily,

We would ask the opportunity to post a rebuttal to your interview with Commissioner Kristine Isnardi on January 9th 2019. There were a number of inaccuracies stated about the function and formation of the Children's Services Council of Brevard and we are sure your readers would appreciate learning more about this important subject.

The following is in response to public comments by Commissioner Kristine Isnardi to Space Coast Daily on January 8th, after she brought a motion to dissolve the CSC of Brevard before the county commission without providing advance notice to the public or the Children's Service Council itself.

First, the article states that during their November meeting the CSC discussed bypassing the county commission and going directly to the people via a petition to be placed on the ballot. This is true and it was in fact the suggestion of Commissioner Isnardi to do so.

The Children's Services Council went before the County Commission on July 24, 2018 and asked them to place funding for the Children's Service Council on the November 2018 ballot so the people can decide if they would finally like to fund the Council. At that meeting, Commissioner Isnardi stated that she "thinks the CSC should have gotten the signatures" to go to ballot. Commissioner Pritchett echoed that preference. Thus, at their November meeting the CSC took the Commissioners comments as a directive and began preparing for a petition drive. (minutes provided, bottom of page 21)

Why Commissioner Isnardi would now disagree with something that was her stated position just six months ago is unclear.

Second, Commissioner Isnardi stated the CSC has no no elected oversight. This is false. In the SCD article she said herself, three (3) elected officials serve on the Council: a County Commissioner, a School Board member and a Judge from the 18th Circuit. Two other ex-officio officers hold seats - the BPS Superintendent and a representative from the local office of the Department of Children and Families.

Commissioner Isnardi accepted appointment to serve on the CSC of Brevard for 2018 but attended just 2 of the 10 meetings held. She did not exercise her elected position of authority on the Council to provide oversight, communicate her concerns, or offer input. It is disappointing the proposal was brought up at the January 8th meeting without any advance notice given to the County Commission, the voting public or the CSC itself.

In the January 8th article she also states the CSC model is "taxation without representation" and that it is governed by the county charter, however both statements are categorically wrong. Florida Statute outlines the framework for a CSC to operate as an independent body to look out for the health and well-being of our most vulnerable citizens, and grants the authority to approve funding directly to the voters.

Florida Statute 125.901 (1) “the county governing body (the CSC) shall obtain approval, by a majority vote of those electors voting on the question, to annually levy ad valorem taxes....”

Legislators understood that while it can be hard for local politicians to prioritize spending their limited general revenue tax dollars on services for children, that the voting public may recognize the importance and be willing to personally invest. A CSC is a voter approved silo of dedicated funds to provide services to children.

Legislators also ensured that the funds would have the oversight of the three local elected officials mentioned above, as well as 5 other child-welfare advocates who are recommended by the Brevard County Commission and then appointed by the Governor.

Further, the CSC must seek re-authorization directly from the people at least every 12 years, giving the voting public the chance to decide for themselves if they saw tangible benefits in their community accomplished by the work of the CSC.

And finally, statute 125.901 (4)(a) states “the county governing body may by ordinance dissolve the district subject to the approval of the electorate.” This statute again affirms that the CSC is ultimately accountable to the voters of Brevard County, not the County Commission.

Commissioner Isnardi also asserted that the CSC tax would “be redistributed to charities” and would “have a negative impact on private fundraising.” The reality is that when the CSC of Brevard was first created in 1992 and went before the voters to ask for funding, these arguments were compelling. Voters decided that private charities could handle the burden of caring for the children of Brevard. (population of 425,584 in 1992 according to US census)

It is a testament to the generosity of our local community that we have over 2,000 non-profits within Brevard County that for decades have stepped up to care for their neighbors. However, as Brevard’s population now swells to almost 600,000 ([589,162 as of July 2018 US census](#)) not only are private charities unable to keep up with growing demand, but they are begging for help from anyone - private donors, the county, state or federal representatives - to help them expand services in our area.

Meanwhile Brevard parents are beginning to realize that due to of a lack of local services it is necessary and ridiculous that they should have to drive to Orlando, Tampa, Gainesville or further, to secure basic mental and behavioral health services for their children.

Across the state, the call to action to do better by our children is growing. Statistics show 1 in 5 children in Florida live in poverty and Florida was recently ranked in the bottom 10 for child well-being in a nationwide study by the **Annie E. Casey Foundation**.

While many Counties, like Indian River County, dedicate general revenue dollars with the advice of a [Children’s Advisory Council](#), there are currently 11 independent CSC’s in Florida that levy an ad valorem tax dedicated to funding programs for children. Last summer Orange County also debated funding a CSC. Based largely of the concerns raised by Mayor Theresa Jacobs, which

echo those of Commissioner Isnardi, the Orange County Commission decided to instead dedicate \$20,000,000 a year from their general revenue budget to improve the services available to children.

It is unlikely the Brevard County Commission would make such a commitment, as it has made clear they will be reducing, not increasing dollars from general revenue allocated to support programs for the sick and indigent in Brevard County.

That is why we believe it is time Brevard County voters have the opportunity to vote - to decide for themselves if investing their tax dollars in the health and well-being of our local children is what we as a community should pursue as a high priority.