



Children's Services Council of Brevard

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Op Ed

Written by Bunny Finney, Vice-Chair
Children's Services Council of Brevard

January 17, 2019

For more info contact: Caron Partridge
Telephone: 321.427.0105 or 321.631.2779

Children's Services Council of Brevard Opposes Motion to Dissolve Agenda Item To Go Before The County Commission January 22

Brevard County, FL – The Children's Services Council of Brevard wishes to communicate directly with the public about a proposal brought forth January 8, 2019 by Commissioner Kristine Isnardi to dissolve the Children's Services Council of Brevard.

Children's Services Councils are an established form of governance in Florida, outlined in Florida Statute 125.901, designed specifically to make sure caring for children does not have to compete with funding roads or infrastructure.

While the Brevard Children's Services Council is currently unfunded, a funded CSC would dedicate local tax dollars to care for local children and be overseen by local experts, advocates and local elected officials. CSC's are designed to place the question of levying a tax directly before the people, and then insulate the funding from the changing preferences of partisan politicians.

When Commissioner Isnardi asserts that a CSC is "taxation without representation" she is mistaken. A CSC is by design a voter approved silo of dedicated funds to provide services to children. 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 an informed voting public may recognize the importance and be willing to personally invest.

Legislators ensured that the funds would have the oversight of three local elected officials, a County Commissioner, a School Board member, and a Judge from the local Circuit, as well as 2 other ex-officio officers - the Superintendent of Schools and a representative from the local office of the Department of Children and Families. They serve on the Council with 5 other child-welfare advocates, who are recommended by the Brevard County Commission and then appointed by the Governor.

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.

At the next BOCC meeting on January 22nd, the Commissioners will take up this proposal and we believe it is imperative the voting public understand the attempt of local politicians to usurp the authority vested to the people of Brevard County.

-more-

Florida Statute is the governing authority that 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, not the County Charter. And Florida Statute 125.901 4(a) states "the county governing body may by ordinance dissolve the district subject to the approval of the electorate."

Regarding services provided by local non-profits, it is a testament to the generosity of our local community that we have over 2,000 organizations 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.

To learn more about Children's Service Council of Brevard County visit www.cscbrevard.org.

###

Children's Services Councils (CSCs) are independent special districts of local government, authorized by Florida Statute to assess an ad valorem tax up to one-half mill (\$0.50 per \$1,000) of non-exempt property valuation. They exist in local communities with the sole purpose to improve the lives of children. The Children's Services Council of Brevard is authorized by Florida Statute 125.901 and was created by Local Ordinance #90-41 on November 13, 1990. The Children's Services Council of Brevard is currently unfunded.