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Frustrated mayors take aim at Tallahassee

South Florida Business Journal - by [Darcie Lunsford](#)

Frustrated over what they view as too many unfunded mandates coming out of the state capital, Florida's mayors are shoving back with a new public awareness campaign.

More than a dozen South Florida mayors gathered at lunchtime Thursday at the Atlantis Country Club to unveil the "Stop Passing the Buck" campaign.

The mayoral initiative, being stewarded by the **Florida League of Mayors**, will evaluate all the bills that come out Tallahassee in the upcoming legislative session based on their impact on local governments' coffers and their freedom to self-govern.

Coral Gables Mayor Donald Slesnick outlined local governments' frustration with state lawmakers' passage of a steady stream of laws and regulations in recent years that municipalities were required to dig into their own pockets to pay for.

"It has really interfered with local government to the point where the League of Mayors is ready to speak out," Slesnick said. "We are that concerned – not for ourselves, but for our taxpayers."

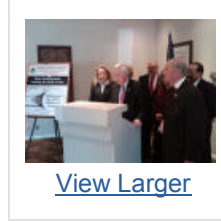
The mayors' complaints range from increased police and fire pension costs and higher school taxes to last year's sweeping growth management law, which, they claim, loosens development regulations and shifts the cost of roads and infrastructure to support new projects to local taxpayers.

"It's a long time coming," Pembroke Pines Mayor Frank Ortis said. "It is finally time that local governments fight back."

This year, mayors will evaluate all state bills passed on a five-point system:

- One to two points will be labeled as a "bad bill," which means it shifts tax burdens to local taxpayers and undermines a city's right to home rule.
- Three to four points is a "very bad bill," which means it goes so far as to harm local taxpayers, services and limits local freedom.
- Five points indicates a "very dangerous bill" that issues in sweeping change, raises local taxes by millions of dollars and usurps local rights to self-government.

"I think most citizens expect local government to be responsive to their concerns," said John Charles Thomas, director of policy and public affairs for the **Florida League of Cities**. "Our hope is that this will lead to more sensitivity to the concerns of local citizens."

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