



State of Florida
Statewide Advocacy Council
Craig Rappel, Chair
Carolyn Shell, Vice Chair
William E.C. Marvin, Executive Director



Dear Governor Bush, President King and Speaker Byrd:

In accordance with my duties of office under Chapter 402, Florida Statutes, I am pleased to present this Annual Report of the Florida Statewide Advocacy Council under the stewardship of myself as the Chair and the Council's Vice Chair Carolyn Shell.

The Council Members, as private citizens accepting the responsibility of public servants with no remuneration, embody the vision of the Great State of Florida laid out by Governor Bush during the Inaugural Speech in January 2003. At the outset of Governor's second term, Governor Bush enthusiastically stated:

"But without a caring society, without each citizen voluntarily accepting the weight of responsibility, government is destined to grow even larger, taking more of your money, burrowing deeper into your lives."

Indeed, the Council Members and the Florida Local Advocacy Council membership of over 500 citizen volunteers received the distinguished Points of Light Award from you Governor Bush and we all thank you for recognizing our calling to bring forth the legacy of what you have stated to be "intractably rooted in a culture that demands excellence, not adequacy; that exalts in the individual, not government; and that through compassion, rather than compulsion, provides solace and support for the most vulnerable among us. "

As your Appointees, a mix of Democrats, Republicans and Independents, the Council membership does, despite hectic daily lives "fiercely guard a time for selflessly helping the most vulnerable and needy." I can speak for all the Council Members to state that we are proud to serve within your Administration, Governor Bush, and to both President King and Speaker Byrd, we say that we are proud of the support of the Florida Legislature's leadership for the mission that you have mandated that we undertake.

As the Guardians of the Public Trust to ensure that Florida State Government provides health and human services in a responsible manner, we strive to work in fellowship with state government employees for the welfare and safety of our most vulnerable citizens. However, as Chair, I implore each of you over this next Session to ensure that denial to access of vital confidential client information and agency turf battles over our authority and responsibility ceases. Not only does Florida State Government operate in the Sunshine, but it is the public will that we, the Council, have the lawful authority to determine whether the right to privacy of a client was violated. Communication, cooperation and coordination is the spirit that should be evoked by all involved in state government, especially as this is the message of our Governor since the tragic events of September 11, 2001. The recent fears opined from state agency lawyers of federal retaliation or retribution because of some privacy regulation falls deaf upon the obligations of citizenship that we, the Council membership, have undertaken with sobriety, honor and reverence to the of office under the State Constitution that we have sworn to execute and to the

Spirit of America, the Spirit of the "Minutemen" of the American Revolution, much in the same vein that our men and women in service to this nation have currently undertaken to protect our constitutional and human rights against abuse and tyranny.

We are unique to the nation in that the Florida Statewide Advocacy Council is a citizen oversight agency operated by a Board and is separate and distinct from the federal protection and advocacy system. We exist to ensure accountability, reliability, integrity and transparency in the delivery of services to Florida's most vulnerable citizens. We, as your citizen army of bright, sophisticated, talented individuals made up of active and retired law enforcement officials, military servicepersons, clergy, educators, healthcare professionals, attorneys, human services providers, and clients of the state programs and services, conduct investigations and monitoring on a "shoe string budget". Many serve as mentors and guardian ad litem beyond the time devoted to the Council's mission. The return to the taxpayers of the investment in enabling the Florida Statewide Advocacy Council and its Florida Local Advocacy Councils throughout the State of Florida is a shining example of fiscal responsibility by each of you. However, because of the extraordinary efficiency of the advocacy function performed by us, the Council should be rewarded through the further endowment of moving us from the Florida Department of Children & Family Services into the Executive Office of the Governor to work in tandem with the Chief Inspector General to compliment our commitment within both the Executive Branch and Legislative Branch to protect and advocate for Floridians with unique needs and to be free and independent in all respects, including loyalty of service staff to the citizen volunteers, from any interference by a state agency and their lawyers.

Turning to the Third Branch of Government, as a member of the Florida Bar, I am proud of my fellow Florida Bar members that have joined me in their service as legal-professional members of the Florida Local Advocacy Councils. Governor Bush, President King and Speaker Byrd, these men and women have helped us in protecting rights, pursuing justice and promoting professionalism. Their work has often gone unrecognized by both the Bench and Bar but are profoundly humbled to volunteer and serve.

I am equally proud of our State Attorney General's commitment to our mission. I also publicly thank General Crist for his compassion to our client's welfare and support of our position in assisting him in his role as "parens patriae" (paternal protector) over the public good of helping those who most desperately need the assistance of the Great State of Florida.

In summation, the Council looks forward in working with the state agencies and contract service providers; we will ensure effective protection of Florida's most vulnerable citizens and efficient services of the programs. We will be working with decision-makers; we will identify threats or conditions that we determine to constitute a violation of human or constitutional rights as to the health, safety or welfare to persons who receive services from state agencies. We will be working with our Florida Local Advocacy Councils; we will supervise and guide the membership of over 500 citizen volunteers through continuing training and education and assisting them in advocating and safeguarding our clients at the local level. We will be working with our dedicated, talented, and motivated staff; we will manifest the highest standards envisioned by the Governor to create a climate of achievement.

To quote Robert Frost, "But I have promises to keep, and miles to go before I sleep".

God bless you all, God bless our Floridians with unique needs and their families and God Bless the State of Florida.

Sincerely,

Craig Rappel
Chair