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Gov. Scott Directs DEO to Enhance Workforce Housing in the Florida Keys

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TALLAHASSEE, Fla. – Governor Scott today directed the Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO) to propose enhanced workforce housing in the Florida Keys as part of the continued efforts to recover from the tremendous impact Hurricane Irma had on the Keys. Hurricane Irma destroyed much of the housing that served the workforce population and proposed Keys Workforce Housing Initiative will allow local governments to grant additional building permits for rental properties. This initiative will be presented to the Florida Cabinet at the next meeting.

Governor Scott said, "Hurricane Irma left a devastating impact on our state, especially in the Florida Keys and since the storm we have been working hard to rebuild even stronger before. For business owners across the Keys, the availability of affordable workforce housing has been a challenge that was compounded by Hurricane Irma. The Keys Workforce Housing Initiative will provide much-needed access to workforce housing, allowing businesses the opportunity to grow while providing a plan to ensure Keys residents can evacuate before a storm."

DEO is charged with reviewing local development decisions in the Florida Keys due to its legislative designation as an Area of Critical State Concern. State law requires that growth be limited in the Keys to ensure that residents can evacuate safely within 24 hours in advance of a hurricane. To meet the increased demand for workforce housing, the innovative Keys Workforce Housing Initiative will require new construction that participates to commit to evacuating renters in the 48-hour window of evacuation.

The initiative will allow up to 1,300 new building permits for workforce housing throughout the Florida Keys. Local governments that choose to participate in the initiative will work with DEO to amend their comprehensive plans to allow for additional building permits that meet these safety requirements.

Cissy Proctor, Executive Director of DEO, said, "As I have toured the damage from Hurricane Irma, the number one priority of business and community leaders is the need for more workforce housing. We are proud to provide an option to local governments that will help businesses have the talent they need to remain in the Keys and grow their companies. This solution will not only provide workforce housing for private-sector businesses but public servants, like law enforcement and teachers, as well. Our agency is committed to working with our partners in the Keys to provide ample workforce housing without compromising the safety of Floridians. We appreciate our partners at the Florida Division of Emergency Management working with us to make sure Keys residents are still able to safely evacuate."

Representative Holly Raschein said, "Hurricane Irma pushed the affordable housing problem in the Florida Keys to a critical state, decimating an already strained stock of housing for the workforce. I have discussed this concern with Governor Scott and the Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO) both in Tallahassee and during the Governor's many visits to the Keys as he's lead us through our recovery efforts. The plan Governor Scott has directed DEO to bring before Cabinet is a creative solution to the most pressing recovery challenge still facing the Florida Keys and I encourage all Cabinet members to support this proposal."

Wes Maul, Director of the Florida Division of Emergency Management, said, "Our agency's primary goal is the safety of Florida residents during disasters. The Keys Workforce Housing Initiative ensures the safety of tourists and residents of the Keys during major storms, while allowing critical economic development activities to continue. We appreciate DEO's partnership in this endeavor."

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