

To the Editor, St. Petersburg Times: (Sent by Alvin Wolfe on Oct 11, 2011)

Thanks to John Barry and the Times for revealing so forthrightly the shame of Hillsborough County in apparently leading the state in deaths to children whom we are supposed to be protecting (Deaths of 8 children put Hillsborough Kids Inc. in limbo, October 9).

Just a few months back, Carol Marbin Miller gave us a comparison at the state level: “Florida not only leads the United States in the number of such deaths, but it dominates the nation” (Florida deadly for kids at risk, February 27).

Do Hillsborough readers appreciate the horrible meaning of these facts? Our state, Florida, has more deaths of children we are committed to protect than has any other state, and our county, Hillsborough, has more such than any other county! Clearly we are doing something wrong in Florida, and within Florida we in Hillsborough County are failing the most!

Understanding why our record is so bad requires careful study of many contributing factors – cultural and psychological values, economic and working conditions, household and community structures. We will only protect Hillsborough’s children by working together as a community devoted to the well-being of children.

For more than a decade I have been collaborating with other child advocates in a statewide organization called Florida Health and Human Services Board, Inc., the major goal of which is to encourage greater involvement of communities in protecting and caring for their children. On our web site <http://fhhsb.org> are many documents devoted to this cause.

Here are links to some of them:

[What's Wrong With Florida's Child Welfare System? They Kept the Communities Out of Community Based Care.](#)

[Historical Background](#)

[Community Alliance Statute](#)

[FHHSB Purposes](#)

[2006 Op-Ed Privatization in Hillsborough](#)

[Demand Better from Child Welfare 2006](#)

[AWWLtrSPTimes,ReYMCAcontract,2007](#)

[Child Deaths](#)

Within this, read:

[**privatization of the child welfare system,**](#)

[**weaknesses of the community alliances,**](#)

and the [**real fix?**](#)

It is utterly astounding how regressive Florida’s tax system is, especially now that there is no tax on intangible wealth. It is also astounding how many Floridians don’t even question that the services to children at risk of abuse or neglect must be further cut when they are at greatest risk because of unemployment and poverty while millionaire Floridians who have benefited from zeroing out the intangibles tax and have barely been touched by the recession could easily afford to pay more in taxes to support services for children.

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The writer is a distinguished professor emeritus in anthropology at USF, and chairs the Florida Health and Human Services Board, Inc. Much more detail of the past ten years can be found on the web site <http://FHHSB.org>