WHITE PAPER

Florida's Property Tax Reform Debate:

A Critical Examination of CFO Ingoglia's Spending Accusations and the Impact of Federal COVID Relief on Local Government Budgets

June 2026

Executive Summary

I have prepared this white paper to provide a thorough, fact-based analysis of Florida Chief Financial Officer Blaise Ingoglia's ongoing campaign accusing Florida local governments of excessive and wasteful spending. These accusations form the political foundation for a proposed constitutional amendment that would eliminate or substantially reduce homestead property taxes — a measure that is expected to appear on the November 2026 statewide ballot.

My analysis raises serious questions about the methodology CFO Ingoglia has employed. Specifically, I find that his formula — which compares current general fund expenditures to a pre-COVID 2019 baseline adjusted for inflation and population growth — fails to account for billions of dollars in federal COVID relief grants that flowed directly through local government general funds between 2020 and 2024. This omission likely inflates his "excessive spending" figures substantially, potentially rendering his central argument misleading.

Additionally, Florida's own constitutional protections, including the Save Our Homes assessment cap, structurally limit how much local governments can extract from rising property values — a constraint that further undermines the CFO's narrative of unchecked property tax growth driven by local fiscal recklessness.

The concerns I raise in this paper are not a defense of local government waste — where it exists, it should be identified and corrected. Rather, my objective is to ensure that the data driving a

major constitutional change is accurate, transparent, and fairly calculated before Florida voters are asked to fundamentally restructure how their local services are funded.

Introduction

Beginning in mid-2025 and continuing through 2026, Florida CFO Blaise Ingoglia has conducted a high-profile statewide tour targeting local governments — counties, cities, and municipalities — accusing them of wasting taxpayer money and over-taxing property owners. Through his Florida Agency for Fiscal Oversight (FAFO), Ingoglia has claimed to have identified more than $1.86 billion in excessive and wasteful spending across roughly a dozen Florida jurisdictions.

The timing of these campaigns is not incidental. Governor Ron DeSantis and CFO Ingoglia have been building a public case for a constitutional amendment that would dramatically reduce or eliminate property taxes on homesteaded properties statewide. The FAFO tour serves a dual political purpose: it generates public outrage against local governments, and it preempts the inevitable argument from local officials that eliminating property taxes would devastate essential services like public safety and infrastructure.

As someone who has studied Florida's local government finance, the federal COVID relief programs, and governmental accounting standards, I believe the CFO's approach has critical methodological flaws that must be examined before this debate goes any further. The stakes are enormous: if the ballot amendment passes and the numbers behind it are wrong, the consequences for local services, infrastructure, and public safety across Florida could be severe and long-lasting.

> *My central argument is this: CFO Ingoglia's formula compares current general fund expenditures — which are inflated by billions of dollars in one-time federal COVID relief spending — to a pre-COVID baseline funded entirely by local tax revenue. This is not an apples-to-apples comparison. It is a flawed methodology that produces inflated "waste" figures and does not accurately reflect how local governments spent property tax dollars.*

Section I: The Political Context — Tax Reform and the 2026 Ballot

To fully understand what CFO Ingoglia is doing and why, it is necessary to understand the political goal his campaign is designed to serve.

Governor DeSantis has made eliminating or substantially reducing homestead property taxes a signature policy priority. The plan is to place a constitutional amendment before Florida voters in

November 2026 that would provide this relief. State lawmakers have already passed a proposed constitutional amendment moving this concept forward, though DeSantis has reportedly criticized some legislative proposals as too modest.

CFO Ingoglia's role has been to build the public narrative: that local governments are bloated, wasteful, and have used rising property values as an excuse to grow government far beyond what taxpayers need or want. At press conference after press conference across the state, Ingoglia has declared that local governments "spent like drunken sailors" and that property tax collections have exploded because local officials refused to roll back millage rates as values soared.

"Government should never grow faster than inflation and population," Ingoglia has said repeatedly. "The only reason they got that extra money is because property values started spiking. Government took all of that extra money and just spent it."

This narrative is designed to neutralize the most powerful counter-argument local governments have: that cutting or eliminating property taxes would force devastating cuts to police, fire, road maintenance, parks, and other essential services. By claiming local governments have nearly $2 billion in easily eliminated waste, the CFO is asserting that cuts to property taxes need not result in cuts to services.

The problem is that this narrative rests on a formula that, as I will demonstrate, does not hold up to scrutiny.

Section II: The FAFO Methodology — How the CFO Gets His Numbers

CFO Ingoglia's Florida Agency for Fiscal Oversight has applied a consistent formula across all of the local governments it has reviewed. Understanding this formula is essential to evaluating the credibility of his findings.

The Formula

Ingoglia's methodology works as follows:

- Start with the local government's General Fund budget for Fiscal Year 2019-2020, which Ingoglia designates as the last "pre-COVID" baseline year.
- Index that baseline figure forward each year, adjusting for cumulative inflation (using the Consumer Price Index) and local population growth.
- Add a 5% "government inefficiency buffer" on top of that adjusted figure.
- Compare the resulting "acceptable" budget figure to the local government's actual General Fund expenditures for FY 2024-2025 or FY 2025-2026.

- Declare everything above the adjusted baseline as "excessive and wasteful spending."

For example, in Palm Beach County, Ingoglia calculated that inflation over six years was 25.4%, population growth was 5.11%, and the buffer brought the acceptable growth figure to 35.61%. The county's budget had actually grown 65.26%, so Ingoglia declared the difference — hundreds of millions of dollars — as waste.

What the Formula Does Not Account For

Critically, Ingoglia has acknowledged that his analysis looks only at the General Fund — not the total budget. He has also refused to release the specific formula calculations for independent verification, meaning no outside analyst has been able to replicate or audit his findings.

> *Ingoglia explicitly stated: "This is just the general fund portion of the budget." Yet his public accusations are framed in absolute terms — declaring that specific dollar amounts represent pure waste and that residents are being "over-taxed" — without acknowledging the significant limitations of a general-fund-only analysis.*

Local government officials across the state have pushed back vigorously on these numbers, arguing that the formula fails to account for: unfunded federal and state mandates that forced new expenditures; major infrastructure investments in water, sewer, and transportation; public safety staffing increases required by population growth; and one-time capital expenditures that cannot reasonably be annualized. However, the most significant flaw — and one I believe has not received adequate attention — concerns the treatment of federal COVID relief grants.

Section III: Federal COVID Relief to Florida Local Governments

Between 2020 and 2024, Florida local governments received an unprecedented infusion of federal COVID relief funding through two major legislative programs. Understanding the scale of this funding is essential to evaluating whether the spending increases Ingoglia identifies are actually the result of local fiscal recklessness or federal policy.

The CARES Act — 2020

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, passed by Congress in March 2020, established a $150 billion Coronavirus Relief Fund for state and local governments. Florida's allocation from this fund totaled approximately $8.33 billion.

Of the portion earmarked specifically for local governments — approximately $3.75 billion — the distribution worked as follows:

CARES Act Distribution — Florida Local Governments	Amount
Direct payments to 12 large counties (pop. > 500,000)	$2.47 billion
State-administered pool for smaller counties (<500,000)	$1.28 billion
Total earmarked for local governments	~$3.75 billion

CARES Act funds were required to be expended by December 31, 2021. The 12 large Florida counties that received direct payments included Brevard, Broward, Hillsborough, Duval, Lee, Miami-Dade, Orange, Palm Beach, Pasco, Pinellas, Polk, and Volusia.

The American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) — 2021

The American Rescue Plan Act, signed into law on March 11, 2021, was far larger in scope. ARPA's Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (SLFRF) program provided $350 billion nationally to state, local, tribal, and territorial governments. Florida's total allocation was substantial:

ARPA Distribution — Florida Local Governments	Amount
Florida counties	~$4.17 billion
Metropolitan cities (pop. > 50,000)	~$1.47 billion
Smaller governments / non-entitlement units (335 cities, towns, townships)	~$1.42 billion
Total to Florida local governments under ARPA	~$7.06 billion

ARPA funds were distributed in two tranches — the first in May 2021, the second in May 2022 — and local governments were required to obligate the funds by December 31, 2024, with spending allowed through December 31, 2026.

The Total Picture

Combined, Florida local governments received approximately $10 to $11 billion in federal COVID relief between 2020 and 2024. This is not incidental background information. It is the central variable that Ingoglia's formula ignores — and its omission fundamentally distorts his findings.

Section IV: The Accounting Flaw — Why General Fund Comparisons Are Misleading

This is the heart of my critique. To understand why Ingoglia's methodology likely produces inflated and inaccurate results, one must understand how governmental accounting standards require COVID relief funds to be recorded — and how those recording practices directly affect the general fund expenditure figures he is using as his benchmark.

How Governmental Accounting Works

Florida local governments, like all governmental entities, follow the Governmental Accounting Standards Board (GASB) framework. Under GASB standards, governments use multiple fund types to segregate revenues and expenditures by purpose and legal restriction. The most relevant fund types for this analysis are:

- General Fund — The primary operating fund of a local government, recording most core governmental activities funded by property taxes, sales taxes, and other general revenues.
- Special Revenue Funds — Used to account for proceeds of specific revenue sources that are legally restricted to expenditure for specified purposes. Federal grants, including COVID relief funds, are typically recorded here.

Under GASB Technical Bulletin 2020-1, both CARES Act and ARPA funds were classified as "voluntary nonexchange transactions" subject to eligibility requirements. This means the federal grant revenue cannot be recognized until the expenditure it is funding has actually been incurred. This accounting treatment has profound consequences for how these funds appear — or don't appear — in general fund budgets.

The Revenue Replacement Problem

The ARPA created a specific mechanism that dramatically complicates Ingoglia's analysis: the revenue replacement provision. Under Treasury rules, local governments were allowed to classify up to $10 million of ARPA funds as "revenue replacement" without needing to demonstrate any actual lost revenue — and larger governments could claim significantly more using a formula-based calculation.

> *When a local government classified ARPA funds as "revenue replacement," those federal dollars were essentially converted into general-purpose funds and transferred directly into the General Fund — where they were then spent like ordinary property tax revenue.*

> *Ingoglia's formula treats every dollar of that spending as a product of local fiscal recklessness, even though the source was entirely federal.*

This is not a minor accounting detail. Nationally, revenue replacement was one of the most widely used ARPA expenditure categories precisely because it gave local governments maximum flexibility. A county that transferred $50 million in ARPA revenue replacement dollars into its general fund and spent that money on services would show up in Ingoglia's analysis as having $50 million more in "excessive" expenditures — when in reality, not a penny of it came from local property taxes.

Other Ways COVID Spending Inflates General Fund Expenditures

Revenue replacement is just one of the mechanisms through which COVID grant money inflates the general fund spending figures Ingoglia uses. There are at least two others:

- Reimbursement Accounting: Many governments ran COVID-related expenditures — PPE, testing supplies, public health operations, emergency personnel — directly through the General Fund and then received reimbursements from the Special Revenue Fund. The expenditure shows as a general fund cost; the reimbursement appears as a general fund revenue. The net effect on fund balance may be zero, but the gross expenditure figure — which is what Ingoglia appears to be using — is inflated.
- Payroll and Benefits Funded by Grants: ARPA explicitly authorized local governments to cover employee salaries and fringe benefits with federal relief funds. Many governments ran those payroll costs through the general fund and were reimbursed from the special revenue fund. Again, the gross general fund expenditure is inflated, but the underlying cost was paid by federal dollars, not local property taxes.

In each of these scenarios, the CFO's formula captures spending that was funded entirely by the federal government and counts it against local government fiscal discipline. This is not an accurate representation of how local property tax dollars were spent.

The Honest Comparison That Has Not Been Done

To produce a valid analysis, any comparison of general fund spending before and after COVID would need to strip out all federal intergovernmental revenues — CARES Act, ARPA, FEMA reimbursements, and any other federal COVID-related transfers — from the expenditure figures in each year between 2020 and 2024. Only then could one fairly compare what local governments actually spent using locally generated tax revenue.

No such analysis has been produced by CFO Ingoglia's office. Since he has refused to release the detailed formula and supporting calculations, there is no way to determine whether his team even attempted this adjustment. Without it, his "excessive spending" figures are comparing apples to oranges — a pre-COVID baseline of pure tax revenue against a post-COVID total padded with billions in one-time federal spending.

Section V: The Save Our Homes Cap — A Structural Constraint on Property Tax Growth

CFO Ingoglia's central narrative is that local governments collected a windfall of property tax revenue as property values surged, and then spent that money recklessly instead of rolling back tax rates. This narrative requires that local governments actually had access to the full benefit of rising property values. Florida's own constitutional framework significantly limits that access — a point the CFO consistently underemphasizes.

How Save Our Homes Works

Florida's Save Our Homes (SOH) constitutional amendment caps the annual increase in the assessed value of homesteaded properties at 3% or the percentage change in the Consumer Price Index, whichever is lower. This cap applies to the overwhelming majority of owner-occupied residential properties in the state.

This means that a homeowner whose property market value increased 30% in a single year would see their taxable assessed value increase by only 3% for property tax purposes. The local government collects taxes based on assessed value — not market value — so it captures only a fraction of the real estate market's appreciation.

For non-homestead residential properties (rentals, second homes, investment properties), a 10% cap applies. New construction is assessed at full market value, but only in the year it is first assessed.

> *The practical effect of these caps is significant: the property tax windfall narrative is most accurate for governments in areas with explosive new construction and large non-homestead property bases. For governments with stable, homestead-heavy communities, the Save Our Homes cap functions as a structural brake that prevents tax collections from rising as dramatically as market values suggest.*

Who Is Actually Paying Higher Property Taxes

The data reveals an important inequity that complicates Ingoglia's narrative: the people most affected by rising property tax bills in Florida are generally not long-term homeowners protected by the Save Our Homes cap. They are new buyers entering the market at current market values, and owners of non-homestead properties who do not have the same assessment protection.

Long-term homeowners — the demographic most likely to feel strongly about property tax relief — actually have significant protection under existing law. This suggests the affordability crisis the CFO is invoking may be more attributable to the structure of Florida's property tax system itself than to local government fiscal recklessness.

Where Revenue Growth Did Occur

That said, it would be inaccurate to suggest that local governments received no benefit from rising property values. Revenue growth did occur through three channels:

- New construction assessed at full market value — Florida's explosive population growth during and after the pandemic created a substantial volume of newly constructed residential and commercial properties, all assessed at market value without SOH protection in their first year.
- Non-homestead properties — Commercial properties, rental properties, and second homes are subject only to the 10% cap and can generate significant revenue increases in hot real estate markets.
- Voluntary millage rate decisions — Some local governments chose not to roll back millage rates when assessed values rose, collecting additional revenue they could have returned to taxpayers.

The question is not whether local government revenue grew — it did. The question is whether that growth was as dramatic and as unrestricted as Ingoglia implies, and whether the spending that followed was actually funded by that local revenue or by the billions in federal COVID grants flowing through the same general fund accounts.

Section VI: The CFO's Claims County by County — Context and Concerns

To illustrate the scope of the CFO's campaign and the concerns I raise, it is worth reviewing the specific claims Ingoglia has made about individual jurisdictions and the responses those claims have generated.

Jurisdiction	CFO's Claimed Waste	Key Local Government Response
Miami-Dade County	\$302M (FY25); \$843M over 5 yrs	Mayor cited two consecutive 1% millage rate reductions and strong bipartisan budget support.

		Budget growth included 2,800 new hires, largely in public safety.
Palm Beach County	$443M (FY25); $1.23B over 6 yrs	County Administrator called figures "totally false." Noted ~50% of budget goes to law enforcement. Disputes methodology.
Broward County	$189M excessive spending cited	Democratic commission noted budget increased $617M (48%) but disputed categorization as waste without itemized specifics.
Hillsborough County	~$279M in FY25	Budget grew 56.6% since 2019; county noted population grew by 123,823 and public safety staffing requirements expanded significantly.
Orange County	Amount not specified	Mayor Jerry Demings called Ingoglia's math "fuzzy" and accused him of politically targeting jurisdictions.
City of Miami	$94M excessive in FY25; $358M over 5 yrs	CFO stated: "If this was a business, the City of Miami would go bankrupt." City officials disputed the characterization.
Flagler County	$59M over 6 yrs	General fund grew from $92.5M to $202.7M. Local critics noted unfunded state and federal mandates drove much of the increase.
Seminole County	$48M–$77M (varied by visit)	Commission Chairman called accusations shocking and was frustrated by lack of detail. The millage rate increase of $27M was cited as evidence of overtaxing.

A consistent pattern emerges across all of these cases: Ingoglia announces a large dollar figure as "waste," offers no specific line-item identification of what should be cut, local officials dispute the numbers and cite factors the formula ignores, and the CFO dismisses their objections as the complaints of "big government apologists."

Section VII: Transparency Concerns — The Formula That Cannot Be Verified

Perhaps the most troubling aspect of this entire exercise is that CFO Ingoglia has refused to release the detailed formula and underlying calculations that produce his "wasteful spending" figures. For an effort conducted under the banner of government transparency and accountability, this is deeply ironic.

The practical consequence is that no independent analyst, no local government, no journalist, and no voter can verify whether his figures are correct. He has told us what the inputs are — 2019 baseline, inflation, population growth, 5% buffer — but he has not disclosed how those inputs are weighted, which inflation index is used, which population data source is referenced, or how year-over-year compounding is applied. Even small differences in these choices can produce meaningfully different results.

> *While demanding transparency from local governments — proposing legislation that would require them to post all contracts online, file annual efficiency reports, and face fines for noncompliance — Ingoglia has simultaneously withheld the very methodology that underlies his most significant public accusations. A Florida Bulldog investigation further revealed that his own Department of Financial Services had 200 contracts missing required public documentation under the Transparency Florida Act, totaling more than $342 million.*

The formula's opacity also prevents any examination of the question central to this white paper: whether, and to what extent, Ingoglia's general fund expenditure figures include COVID grant-funded spending. Until that question is answered with verifiable data, the entire foundation of his argument is suspect.

Section VIII: Implications for the 2026 Property Tax Amendment

The stakes of getting this analysis right cannot be overstated. A constitutional amendment eliminating or substantially reducing homestead property taxes in Florida would fundamentally reshape how local governments are financed for generations to come.

In 2024, the total amount of property taxes collected statewide in Florida was $55 billion, with counties taking in $19.6 billion and cities receiving $8.6 billion. Property taxes are the primary stable, locally controlled revenue source that funds police, fire, emergency medical services, roads, parks, libraries, and county health services across the state. A dramatic reduction in this revenue source would require either equivalent replacement revenue from the state, significant cuts to local services, or both.

If Ingoglia's claim that local governments have nearly $2 billion in easily eliminated waste is based on a methodology that inflates spending figures by failing to account for one-time federal COVID grants, then the argument that property taxes can be dramatically cut without service consequences is built on a false premise. Voters would be making a consequential decision based on inaccurate data.

I am not arguing that property tax reform is inherently wrong. There are legitimate concerns about affordability, and Florida's Save Our Homes structure does create inequities between long-term homeowners and new buyers. These are real issues that deserve serious policy attention. But the solution to those issues should be grounded in an honest accounting of how local governments actually spend locally generated tax revenue — not a formula that conflates federal COVID relief spending with property tax-funded waste.

Section IX: Recommendations

Based on my analysis, I offer the following recommendations to policymakers, media, local government officials, and Florida voters as this debate moves forward.

For the Florida Legislature and Policymakers

- Require full public disclosure of the FAFO methodology, including the specific formula, data sources, inflation index, and population growth figures used for each jurisdiction audited.
- Commission an independent analysis of local government general fund expenditures that separates federally funded expenditures (CARES Act, ARPA, FEMA, and other grants) from locally funded expenditures before drawing conclusions about fiscal discipline.
- Evaluate any proposed property tax constitutional amendment against realistic revenue projections, not projections that assume billions in "waste" identified by an unverified formula.

For Local Governments

- Proactively publish detailed reconciliations of general fund expenditures that clearly identify which line items were funded by federal grants versus local tax revenue during the FY 2020 through FY 2024 period.
- Engage independent CPAs or government finance experts to apply the FAFO formula to your own budget data, stripping out federally funded expenditures, and publish the corrected figures publicly.
- Clearly communicate to residents how COVID grant funds were received, how they were categorized in your accounting system (special revenue versus general fund), and how they were spent.

For Florida Voters

- Demand to see the specific formula and supporting calculations before accepting CFO Ingoglia's waste figures as valid.
- Ask whether the government services you rely on — police response times, road conditions, fire station locations, emergency medical services — would be maintained under the property tax reduction scenarios being proposed.

- Recognize that while long-term homeowners are well-protected by Save Our Homes, new homebuyers and renters (via non-homestead properties) are already bearing a disproportionate share of the property tax burden under current law.

Conclusion

Florida is in the midst of a consequential public policy debate about property taxes, local government spending, and the appropriate role of state government in overseeing local fiscal decisions. CFO Blaise Ingoglia has injected urgency and headline-grabbing figures into that debate — but the foundation of those figures does not hold up to scrutiny.

His formula compares locally-funded pre-COVID baselines to post-COVID general fund totals that include billions of dollars in federally funded COVID relief spending. His analysis looks only at the General Fund, ignoring that federal grants often flow through general fund expenditure lines via revenue replacement transfers, reimbursement accounting, and payroll subsidies. He has refused to release the formula for independent verification. And he has failed to acknowledge the structural constraints Florida's own Save Our Homes amendment places on property tax revenue growth.

None of this means Florida local governments are beyond scrutiny or immune from waste. Government efficiency matters, and accountability is legitimate and necessary. But accountability requires accurate data. And a constitutional amendment that will affect every Floridian's access to local services for decades deserves to be grounded in honest math — not a political formula designed to reach a predetermined conclusion.

I urge Florida's policymakers, media, and voters to demand that transparency before November 2026.

— End of White Paper —

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