



## County clerks object to "power grab"

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County clerks were in Tallahassee today raising objections to a measure that would transfer some of their duties and funding to the state court system.

Billed as an efficiency move, the bills could save as much as \$200 million \_ which is an attractive goal to lawmakers looking at a state budget with a \$5 billion or greater deficit.

But the Florida Association of County Clerks and three court clerks said the savings in the bills \_ sponsored by Rep. Ellyn Bogdanoff, R-Fort Lauderdale, and Sen. Ken Pruitt, R-Port St. Lucie \_ were overstated and the measures would undermine the clerk's authority as constitutionally elected officers.

Sarasota County Clerk Karen Rushing the state's financial crisis was the "impetus for this power grab." She warned that the savings lawmakers were seeking may be illusory.

"We believe there is a credible argument that not only will there not be a savings but there will be an increase in expenditures," she said.

Rushing said the state's clerks believed the legislation "has no merit" and would be urging voters to contact their lawmakers to reject the bills.

Fred Baggett, a lobbyist and general counsel for the clerks' association, also said allegations that the clerks' budgets had soared in recent years well ahead of the court budgets were not true. According to the clerks' calculations, the clerks' budgets have increased 21.7 percent since 2004, while the courts' budget has gone up 22.7 percent.

Despite the clerks' opposition, the bills may have some momentum in the Legislature given the strong support from the judiciary.

The state court system released a statement welcoming the filing of the bills.

"We are grateful for the sponsors' interest in stabilizing funding for the courts," the judiciary said. "This is a priority strongly supported by Florida Chief Justice Peggy Quince and the Supreme Court as well as the 25 chief judges of Florida's judicial circuits and district courts of appeal."