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CONTACT: Robert Weissert
Director of Communications
850-222-5052, ext. 20
850-321-5052 (cell)
robert@floridataxwatch.org

Florida TaxWatch Releases Analysis of Florida's Hospital Taxing District System

TALLAHASSEE — A Florida TaxWatch *Briefing* released today finds that Florida's hospital taxing district system is overdue for a comprehensive review. The report, *Florida's Fragmented Hospital Taxing District System in Need of Reexamination*, focuses on the purpose of the state's hospital taxing districts, as well as the evolution of the system into its current form, and concludes that "a comprehensive review by healthcare experts, and follow-up by elected officials, is needed."

There are 32 active hospital districts in Florida, of which 16 are independent hospital taxing districts – meaning these districts have the ability to levy ad valorem taxes. These 16 independent hospital taxing districts were the focus of the Florida TaxWatch study.

"Property taxes levied by hospital districts have been increasing rapidly, reaching almost \$600 million in 2007," said **Kurt Wenner**, Director of Tax Research for Florida TaxWatch, the nonpartisan, nonprofit research institute and government watchdog that conducted the study. "There are different laws governing each district. As many of these districts – and their property taxes – grow larger, it is time for a comprehensive review by policymakers on a statewide level."

Florida's hospital taxing districts have been around for over 80 years and they have evolved significantly since their original conception. According to the report, their traditional purposes of providing indigent care and ensuring access to hospital facilities are often no longer the main focus, as they have expanded their roles and now compete with other non-tax supported hospitals.

The report recommends that, "funding of indigent care should be re-evaluated with an eye toward better coordination statewide and increased uniformity. All current models should be compared to determine which method of using tax dollars for indigent care is the most cost-effective – considering both taxpayer cost and the needs of the indigent." Overall, the report concludes that hospital taxing districts "have changed, and so have, presumably, the health care needs of Florida. It is time to see whether the laws governing these special hospital taxing districts need to change as well."

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Florida TaxWatch is a statewide, non-profit, non-partisan research institute that over its 30 year history has become widely recognized as the watchdog of citizens' hard-earned tax dollars. Its mission is to provide the citizens of Florida and public officials with high quality, independent research and education on government revenues, expenditures, taxation, public policies and programs and to increase the productivity and accountability of Florida state and local government. Its support comes from homeowners and retirees, small and large businesses, philanthropic foundations, and professional associations. On the web at www.FloridaTaxWatch.org.