

Downtown agency lobbies state to keep jobs incentive

By CATHERINE LACKNER

Fearing that a powerful recruiting tool might be diluted or eliminated, directors of Miami's Downtown Development Authority voted last week to send a resolution to Tallahassee in support of continuing the state's Qualified Target Industry Tax Refund Incentive Program, which rewards business for creating high-wage jobs in certain sectors.

The targeted industries are aviation, life sciences, financial services, information technology and telecommunications, international business, professional services, and film and

entertainment. New and expanding businesses in those industries that create new jobs paying at least 115% of the average annual wage can receive refunds on sales, corporate income, ad valorem, intangible personal property, insurance premium and certain other taxes.

The program is scheduled to sunset in June – it can be eliminated or changed then, said James Kohnstamm, director of business expansion, retention, recruitment and urban initiatives for the Beacon Council, Miami-Dade's public-private economic development organization.

Two bills proposed by leg-



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islators threaten the program, he said. Florida Senate Bill 4-01009A proposes to disallow ad valorem tax from being considered as eligible for re-

bate, while draft Legislation PCB 7048 will not allow the statewide average to be used for comparison when it is lower than the average wage

in a particular county. Because wages in urban counties are typically higher, this put large cities at a disadvantage.

"This is one of the key tools in attracting businesses and it's on the chopping block," said Alyce Robertson, Downtown Development Authority executive director. "We want the state to re-enact the QTI program as it is."

"I suggest you all write letters," she told authority directors. "The program is very vulnerable, and if we lose this, [Beacon Council President and CEO] Frank Nero might as well close up shop."