TALLAHASSEE – Governor Charlie Crist today, as part of his ongoing commitment to higher education, proposed a set of university system reforms aimed at strengthening Florida’s 11 institutions while maintaining access and affordability for students and their families. The proposal also would provide stability to the state university system by clarifying university governance at the local and state level, giving university boards of trustees authority over day-to-day operations and personnel while giving the Board of Governors power over longer-range planning.

“A well-educated workforce opens the door to endless opportunities for every Floridian, and for the Sunshine State,” said Governor Crist. “By working together, my administration, the Legislature, and the higher education community can make our universities stronger than ever. This proposal is an example of the improvements we can make for college students by bringing stakeholders together.”

Under the proposal, the boards of trustees at each university would have the option to establish, with Board of Governors approval, a differential tuition higher than the base rate charged to in-state undergraduates. The differential cannot exceed 15 percent each year. Florida’s university tuition is now among the lowest in the country. Base tuition would continue to be covered by the Bright Futures Scholarship Program. The tuition changes would not affect families that have purchased Florida Prepaid College Plan contracts. Also, 30 percent of the differential tuition revenues would go toward need-based student aid. The remainder would be used for faculty recruitment and retention, and programs to improve graduation and retention rates and other areas identified by universities.

“I applaud the Governor for recognizing universities’ needs and working with our board and with university leaders to develop this proposal,” said Board of Governors chairwoman Sheila McDevitt. “The Board of Governors looks forward to continuing to work with lawmakers and the Governor’s Office to address universities’ needs.”

“This is really as sweeping and dramatic a proposal in higher education as we’ve seen in decades, and there have been some big changes in that time,” said University of North Florida President John Delaney. “The revenues from this tuition plan will help our students, by enabling universities to hire new professors and offer more varieties of classes that are smaller.”
The proposal also would clarify universities’ governance. Each institution’s board of trustees would have authority to oversee daily operations and university-level matters including the selection of presidents, budgets, and growth planning. The Board of Governors would have authority to approve trustees’ tuition requests, as well as their requests for curriculum changes, program expansions, and long-term strategic plans. Universities also would be held accountable, by being required to track and measure their improvements in a number of areas including graduation and retention rates.

“These reforms are the result of much discussion between the Governor and his administration, university and business leaders, and Board of Governors members,” said Dean Colson, Governor Crist’s Special Advisor on Higher Education. “By working together for meaningful changes that address the needs of students and our universities, all the stakeholders can prepare Florida’s 11 public institutions to give students the best education possible.”

# # #