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## Village helps AHEC meet funding goal

By LEE WARDLAW Keys Citizen

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During its recent June meeting, the Islamorada Village Council unanimously approved \$50,000 in funding for the Florida Keys Area Health Education Centers (AHEC) to support health and dental services to medically vulnerable and underserved children in Monroe County.

The action came after a \$650,000 request to the Florida Legislature was excluded from the approved state budget, leaving the local nonprofit organization strapped for cash and scrambling to raise funds or be forced to forgo providing services that play a vital role for island chain residents. The village's donation helped the AHEC raise the \$650,000 it initially sought.

Despite being overlooked in Tallahassee, the Florida Keys community quickly came to the rescue for AHEC, with several local civic groups, nonprofits and governmental organizations helping to cover the financial shortfall. The village joins a long list of donors including the cities of Key West and Marathon, the Health Foundation of South Florida, Monroe County's Human Services Advisory Board, Ocean Reef Community Foundation, Ocean Reef Children's Foundation, Monroe County School District, United Way of Collier and the Keys, the Edward B. and Joan T. Knight Foundation, the Monroe County Sheriff's Office, the Florida Health Department of Monroe County, Florida Blue, Baptist Health South Florida, the Florida Association of

Free Charitable Clinics, the Marathon Rotary Club, Key West Rotary Club and the Golden Fleece Foundation.

Islamorada Vice Mayor Henry Rosenthal originally proposed that the village provide the \$50,000 in funding. The nonprofit received state funding annually since 2014 until this year's legislative session. This year's request was filed last November by state Rep. Jim Mooney, R-Islamorada, but didn't move past the House's Health Care Appropriations Subcommittee.

Keys AHEC originally hired lobbyist firm Metz Husband and Daughton to pursue funding, but then pivoted to a new firm, Johnson and Stewart Government Strategies.

Michael Cunningham, Florida Keys AHEC chief executive officer, commended the Islamorada Village Council for its efforts.

"We're very pleased to be working with the village of Islamorada and their council members with the support they were able to offer. The last grant contract put us at the point where we have met our \$650,000 shortfall," he said.

The grant also helped the nonprofit perform two other essential functions.

"It also provided the last amount of funding needed to meet both of our Ocean Reef Community Foundation match grants. The additional funding will also ensure there will be no interruption in medical or dental care for the children that we serve in the upcoming school year," he said.

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