

From: Darla Letourneau [mailto:letournd@comcast.net]
Sent: Sunday, April 04, 2010 11:00 AM
To: Senate President Jeff Atwater (atwater.jeff.web@flsenate.gov)
Subject: Fund Homeless House Assistance Grants

Senate President Atwater:

I am a resident of Lee County and, as a member of the Zonta Club of Sanibel-Captiva, I was worked with SWFAS for over 10 years, and know firsthand the important work that they're doing for our community and the successes they have had, one person at a time as they move through the Transitional Living Center. In these tough times, the demand for their services have increased at the same time as their resources are threatened with reduction.

It is imperative that our state elected officials find ways to cost-effectively meet the needs of the citizens of Florida, especially those citizens who are suffering the most. As more and more people lose their jobs, their homes, and their dignity, we see more people with substance abuse and mental health issues, more child abuse cases, and more homelessness. I urge you not to cut funds for substance abuse and mental health programs. I also urge you to continue funding the \$5 million Homeless Housing Assistance Grant program (HAG). Cutting funds for these programs is a short-term strategy that will not work—that in reducing these already under-resourced services the costs will shift to health care, criminal justice and child welfare systems—all more expensive and less likely to address the core problems.

Here's what's at stake immediately for our community if this HAG program is not funded. Through SWFAS's award-winning leadership team, they succeeded in receiving a \$416,000 grant in December from the State Housing Initiative Partnership to tear down an old building and build a new short term residential treatment facility for the special needs population of persons recovering from drug and or alcohol addiction. More than 50% of the people who come into their programs come directly from homelessness. The construction of this new facility will not only provide more beds for more people on the waiting list, the project will also provide badly needed jobs for laid off people in Lee County where the unemployment rate is hovering around 14%. In order for SWFAS to begin this project, it must come up with an additional \$200,000 soon or they will lose the \$416,000 if it is not obligated by December 2010. SWFAS had planned to apply for a HAG grant, and given its past success in receiving and using these grants, they are likely to be awarded this grant. However, the process is on hold awaiting action by the Legislature. The House appropriations bill contains the \$5 million to continue this program and I urge the Senate to retain this funding.

I hope I can count on your support so that these desperately needed addiction, mental health, and homeless services can continue. Thank you.

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