



January 5, 2017

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Senator Kathleen Passidomo  
Senator Denise Grimsley

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Representative Heather Fitzenhagen

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Lee County Legislative Delegation 2017:

The Lighthouse of SWFL, Inc. has provided Vision Rehabilitation to residents of Lee, Hendry, and Glades Counties since 1974. Our Mission is to teach people with major vision loss to blindness how to be independent and become active in the workplace and in their community.

Serving as Executive Director, coming up on my tenth year, I have participated in our Statewide association, Florida Association of Agencies Serving the Blind, FAASB. Today's request is based upon our Statewide needs in serving Seniors, Children, and Babies struck with major vision loss to total blindness. Information about our impact in Lee, Hendry, and Glades Counties provides a perspective of our efforts within the larger picture in Florida.

The seventeen FAASB agencies throughout Florida are requesting an increase in funding in the following programs because of the need far outweighs the funding:

**Seniors with major Low Vision or Blindness**

- FAASB agencies FY 14-15 served 2,498 seniors with funding for only 1,874.
- FAASB agencies FY 15-16 served 2,563 with funding for only 1,879.
- All 17 FAASB agencies serve seniors.
- Average cost is \$4,000 per senior with funding from DBS covering only \$2,100 per senior.
- Lighthouse of SWFL, Inc. served 216 with funding for only 111 in FY 14-15
- Lighthouse of SWFL, Inc. served 224 with funding for only 111 in FY 15-16.
- Private fundraising for seniors is especially difficult.
- FAASB is asking for \$1,500,000 to be added to the DBS Budget of \$3,912.300 to partially address this growing population.

**Blind Babies (birth to 4/5)**

- FAASB Agencies FY 14-15 served 730 babies with funding for only 654.
- FAASB Agencies FY 15-16 served 738 with funding for only 654.
- Only 11 agencies were able to start this program. Three agencies have no Blind Babies Program because of lack of funding. All agencies with this program raise funds privately to attempt to cover the gap.
- Average cost per baby per year is \$2,691 per year.
- Lighthouse of SWFL, Inc. Blind Babies Program grew from 10 to 30. We are funded for 15. A wait list is pending if funding is not increased.
- FAASB is asking for \$500,000 to be added to the DBS Budget of \$1,759,914 to partially address this growing need in Florida.

**Children Vision Rehabilitation (4/5 to 14)**

- This is a new and unique program. See the attached document for details.
- Some FAASB agencies, such as Lighthouse of SWFL, Inc., started their program with private funding.
- Average cost of per child is \$6,000 per year.
- In Lee, Hendry, and Glades Counties, we know of 53 children needing services. We currently are funded for 10 and are serving 15.
- FAASB is asking for \$1,000,000 to be added to the DBS Budget of \$750,000 (\$500,000 recurrent) to partially address this growing need in Florida.

FAASB, in support of DBS, is looking for sponsors to seek this funding in the 2017 Legislative Session.

If you have not toured The Lighthouse of SWFL, Inc., I personally am inviting you to come for a visit and meet with many of our clients, staff, and Board members. Legislative and Congressional visits have become a highlight in our programs each year.

Sincerely,  
  
Douglas Fowler, LMHC  
Executive Director

