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State must restore funds for kids' eye care

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The Florida Legislature must restore \$250,000 to provide free dilated eye examinations and prescription eyeglasses to indigent children throughout the state.

The Florida Heiken Children's Vision Program (FHVCP) is administered by Miami Lighthouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired in collaboration with optometrists, many of whom volunteer their time and expertise. Funding is provided by Florida's Department of Health, The Children's Trust and generous private donors. Each year more than 1,000 schools throughout the state refer underserved children so the program can give examinations to needy children whose families cannot afford to pay for these services.



Since its founding in 1992 by the Dade County Optometric Association, the mission of FHCVP has been to provide early detection of vision impairments and to make sure all underserved or underprivileged children have access to a comprehensive eye exam.

It is imperative the Florida Legislature reinstate the funds it cut last year from the budget and add it to the \$750,000 in recurring funds to address the unmet need of Florida's schoolchildren. Without this funding during the first six months of the school year, 5,041 low-income schoolchildren in Miami-Dade County who have already been referred will not receive vision care through the program. Additionally, 6,002 schoolchildren throughout the rest of the state won't either. We ask the Florida lawmakers and Gov. Ron DeSantis to restore these funds to the state budget.

The ultimate beneficiaries are the children who represent our future. There is no program with a more effective return on the state's investment in children.

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