

LEGISLATURE'S BUDGET CUT THREATENS TO DENY EYE CARE
TO THOUSANDS OF INDIGENT FLORIDA SCHOOL CHILDREN

Thousands of indigent Florida school children will lose the opportunity for free eye care, unless the Legislature restores a \$250,000 budget cut that threatens the outreach of the Florida Heiken Children's Vision Program.

The Florida Heiken Children's Vision Program is administered by Miami Lighthouse for the Blind & Visually Impaired in collaboration with a network of more than 1,000 optometrists throughout the state. Funding is provided by the State of Florida Department of Health, The Miami-Dade Children's Trust and generous private donors. Four Heiken Program mobile eye care units take primary eye care directly to Florida's school children. Each year, more than 1,000 schools from Tallahassee to Key West refer underserved children, so that the Heiken Program can provide free dilated eye examinations and prescription glasses to needy children whose families cannot afford these services.

"We ask the Florida Legislature and Governor DeSantis to restore those funds to the State budget," said Miami Lighthouse President and CEO Virginia Jacko. "The ultimate beneficiaries would be the children of our state who represent our future. There is no program with a more effective return on the State's investment in children."

The Florida Legislature cut \$250,000 last year from the Heiken Program budget, leaving \$750,000 in recurring funds to address the unmet needs of school children who cannot see the board or read because their families cannot afford appropriate vision care. Unless the \$250,000 is restored, 5,041 low-income school children in Miami-Dade

County who have been referred and whose parents have completed consent forms will not receive vision care at no cost through the Heiken Program.

In total, 6002 children throughout Florida referred to the Heiken Program will not receive vision care. These figures do not reflect the many thousands of referrals anticipated during the remaining five months of the current school year.

For more information about Miami Lighthouse for the Blind and its Florida Heiken Children's Vision Program, contact Virginia Jacko at vjacko@miamilighthouse.org, or 305-856-4176.