

SPEAKING OF JUSTICE

NEWS FROM FFLA

VOL. 18 | ISSUE NO. 1

Legal kiosk project supports Indian River County

Funded by an Improvements in the Administration of Justice grant from FFLA, United Way of Indian River County's Self Help Center legal kiosks have benefited nearly 4,000 parties in need

By Makayla Archambeault

Opened in September 2023, Access to Justice (A2J) Self Help Center legal kiosks have been groundbreaking in Indian River County (IRC). The kiosks offer free civil legal advice and services for individuals unable to afford an attorney. A2J is an initiative of the United Way of IRC in collaboration with the Clerk of Court, the local judiciary and county government.

The kiosks have improved local community members' access to justice through increased support hours and resources. FFLA funded almost half of the legal kiosks project.

After two opened in 2023, two more locations were added in August 2024. Three of the remote legal kiosks were launched strategically around IRC to supplement the primary courthouse site and meet the needs of underserved communities.

"The success of these legal kiosks reflects that cooperation and innovation can extend legal aid to areas not previously served," FFLA Executive Director Donny MacKenzie said.

Additionally, clients can access the same resources online any time at www.a2jirc.org. Kiosks provide legal forms for family law, small claims, and residential law, which can be sent directly to a supervisor for review.

As of February 2025, the program relieved Self Help Center customers of more than \$57,000 in legal services and fees they would not have been able to afford otherwise.



Self Help Center Legal Kiosks currently operate at four locations throughout Indian River County.

"Our unique combination of legal kiosks, bilingual navigators embedded in the courthouse, and virtual attorney consultations has enabled us to serve nearly 4,000 self-represented parties," United Way of Indian River County CEO Meredith Egan said.

The impact of the program is evident, especially in cities like Fellsmere.

"Fellsmere is a small, rural, under-resourced community in Indian River County. The median age is 32 years old, with a household income of \$28,000 and a poverty rate of 18.9%. Education data indicates that 37% of the residents have no degree, and only 31% have earned a high school diploma," IRC County Commissioner Susan Adams said.

"The roadblocks to those seeking help are obvious. This is a hardworking community and residents must work to support

See KIOSK, p. 6



FFLA President Ashley N. Sybesma took office July 1, 2025. She is an attorney at The Smith Law Firm in Key West. A graduate of the University of Miami School of Law, she was honored with The Florida Bar's President's Pro Bono Service Award for the 16th Judicial Circuit in 2018. She has previously served as chair of the 16th Circuit Unauthorized Practice of Law Committee and as a longtime member of the 16th Judicial Circuit's Professionalism Committee. In 2020, she was appointed by Governor Ron DeSantis to the 16th Circuit Judicial Nominating Commission. Sybesma has been recognized for her civic involvement and leadership throughout Monroe County, having served as president of the Monroe County Bar Association and a board member of Florida Keys Healthy Start Coalition.

I'm pleased to share several exciting developments from FFLA. First, we are working to streamline our IOTA-funded grant programs, making the process more efficient for both our staff and grantees. This includes providing supplemental funding opportunities with simplified applications and eliminating redundant reporting requirements. By aligning the grant cycles to all begin in January, we will also reduce administrative burden.

For several months, we have also been working toward fully funding essential technology platforms Westlaw and LegalServer for our grantees. This centralized approach will significantly reduce costs and administrative overhead while ensuring all grantees have access to the tools they need to serve their communities effectively.

Looking ahead, we're excited to collaborate with voluntary bar associations across Florida to enhance disaster relief resources. Given Florida's unique challenges, this partnership will strengthen our collective ability to respond when communities need legal assistance most.

I'm delighted to announce that Crossroads for Florida Kids and Indian River Legal Aid have joined our network as qualified legal aid organizations and are new IOTA distribution recipients. Though small organizations, they demonstrate remarkable dedication to their communities, and we look forward to supporting their growth.

Finally, please join me in congratulating former Florida Bar Foundation President Steve Senn, who received the 2026 Tobias Simon Pro Bono Service Award. Steve exemplifies the extraordinary dedication to pro bono service that inspires our legal community.

Thank you for your continued support of FFLA's mission.

Ashley N. Sybesma

EXECUTIVE

Dominic C. "Donny" MacKenzie, Executive Director
dmackenzie@FundingFLA.org

COMMUNICATIONS

Jessica Brown, Communications Director
jbrown@FundingFLA.org

DEVELOPMENT

Michelle Fonseca, Development Director
mfonseca@FundingFLA.org

FINANCE

Julie Collins, Finance Director
jcollins@FundingFLA.org

GRANTS

Ember Long, Interim Grants Manager
elong@FundingFLA.org

IOTA

Lushawn Phillips, IOTA Program Director
lphillips@FundingFLA.org

2025-26 OFFICERS

Ashley N. Sybesma, President
Maria C. Gonzalez, President-elect
Ret. Judge Hugh Carithers, First Vice President
Ret. Justice Peggy A. Quince, Second Vice President
Roberto R. Pardo, Immediate Past President

DESIGNATED DIRECTORS

A. Dax Bello, Stewart Tilghman Fox Bianchi & Cain
(Delegate for Roland Sanchez-Medina, Past President, The Florida Bar)
Joshua T. Chilson, Johnson Pope Bokor Ruppel & Burns LLP
(Delegate for Sia Baker-Barnes, President, The Florida Bar)
Honorable Paetra T. Brownlee, Sixth District Court of Appeal
Honorable Thomas D. Winokur, First District Court of Appeal
Michael R. Tein, President, Florida Legal Services, Inc.
Melissa VanSickle, Kutak Rock
(Delegate for Michael Fox Orr, President-elect, The Florida Bar)

PUBLIC MEMBERS

Vincent F. Cuomo
Deborah C. Giles
James P. Schwarz

DIRECTORS

(Terms expire 2026)
Sarita Courtney-Baigorri
Ayana Barrow
Brian E. Currie
Joseph Kadow
Kyle Robisch
Steve Salzer

(Terms expire 2027)
Ian M. Comisky
Joe Jacquot
Patrick S. Montoya
Magdalena Ozarowski
Douglas H. Reynolds
Honorable Edwin A. Scales III

(Terms expire 2028)
Lakeisha Babers
Laura Boeckman
Lynn Drysdale
Miriam Soler Ramos
James Robinson
Raychelle Tasher

Former Summer Fellow is now a "Legal Aid Lifer"

Tenesia C. Hall knew she wanted to be a lawyer since elementary school.

Hall, now the Family Law Litigation Director at Legal Aid Society of the Orange County Bar Association in Orlando, was a summer fellow there 26 years ago. The fellowship, funded by the Foundation (now FFLA), changed everything.

"That exposure in the infancy of my career sparked the flame and paved the way for my lifelong service to Florida's families," Hall said. "I returned to legal aid after graduating from law school and never left – I'm happily a legal aid lifer."

The fellowship gave Hall hands-on experience in family, housing and consumer law, providing broad exposure to the legal challenges facing low-income clients. The practical nature of the work proved invaluable in ways she didn't expect.

"The following summer, when I took The Florida Bar Exam, several essay questions mirrored issues I had already encountered during my fellowship, reinforcing just how practical and valuable the experience was," Hall said.

Hall comes from a family of "teachers and preachers", making public service a natural fit. As a legal aid lawyer, she helps Florida's most at-risk, low-income families who lack the financial resources to protect their interests.

"Working in public interest law allows me to make a real difference in someone's life, often with lifelong or even generational impact," she said.

The fellowship not only provided a professional home but also opened doors to leadership roles within The Florida Bar and the Orange County Bar Association. Today, Hall trains and mentors family law professionals while working on systemic changes to strengthen legal service delivery.

This summer, Hall will supervise two FFLA Civil Legal Aid Summer Fellows, continuing the cycle of mentorship that shaped her career.

She hopes that the fellows will gain confidence along with practical skills, and understand their responsibility to clients. She makes an effort to encourage law students to consider public interest work, noting they gain responsibility early, learn quickly and see direct impact.



Tenesia C. Hall, Chair-elect of The Florida Bar Family Law Section

"Even for those who do not remain in public interest long term, the experience creates better, more grounded and well-rounded attorneys," Hall said. "Summer fellowship programs are critical to the future of public interest law. They create access to mentorship and opportunity while helping legal aid organizations continue serving their communities effectively."

Hall, incoming chair of The Florida Bar Family Law Section, praised the section for sponsoring four fellows in summer 2025 and six in summer 2026.

"I think it's critical that sections continue to support and contribute to FFLA," Hall said. "The Family Law Section of The Florida Bar has done a tremendous job of this, and I hope and encourage other sections to do the same!"

Florida Bar Section Leaders

Sponsorships now open for 2027 Summer Fellows:
Support law students by funding Civil Legal Aid
Summer Fellowships in your area of law!

Contact Michelle Fonseca at mfonseca@FundingFLA.org.



SAVE THE DATE
THURSDAY, JUNE 18, 2026

Join us at our annual award ceremony and breakfast to celebrate the winners of the Medal of Honor, Curran Award, Goldstein - Van Nortwick Award and more.



2026 Medal of Honor Award Sponsor

Scan QR code for sponsorships, tickets and more.

December 2025 Board of Directors report

The FFLA Board of Directors convened in Tampa, Fla., on December 12, 2025. The meeting was hosted by Stetson University College of Law.

Presentations

The Board received two presentations, one by Theresa Prichard, Executive Director of Gulfcoast Legal Services, and another by J. Michael Shea and Lamine Gueye of St. Michael's Legal Center.

The Board also received a report from the Hillsborough County Bar Association regarding a grant it received for its expungement project from FFLA via an anonymous donor.

The Board extends its gratitude to the presenters for their informative and well-prepared sessions. The Board also extends its deep appreciation to Ret. Judge E.J. Salcines, Jr., who facilitated the arrangements for the meeting in Tampa, which saved FFLA considerable time and expense.

Meeting - Action Items

President Ashley N. Sybesma presided and the major action items taken up and decided at the meeting follow.

Report of the Audit Committee

A. Audited Financial Statements FYE 6-30-25

Audit Committee Chair Steve Salzer presented Audited Financial Statements for FFLA and The Florida Bar Foundation Endowment, as prepared by Carr Riggs & Ingram CPAs (CRI).

CRI Partner Heather Mosier then presented, and indicated that the report was unmodified and found no internal control findings or significant unusual transactions. The report further opined that FFLA's consolidated financial statements presented fairly in all material respects in accordance with generally accepted and applicable accounting principles.

After an executive session, Chair Salzer announced that the Board accepted the audit and authorized Mr. MacKenzie, as Executive Director, and Ms. Julie Collins, as Director of Finance, to sign the applicable representation letters related to the audit process. Mr. MacKenzie thanked the staff, especially Ms. Collins and Ms. Lindsey Stout in the Finance Department, for its hard work and for remaining diligent and cognizant of FFLA's internal procedures regarding all financial transactions and reviews.

B. Use of IOTA Funds Audit

Mr. Salzer also discussed FFLA's consideration of grantees' proposed Agreed Upon Procedures regarding Use of IOTA Funds Audits and FFLA's retention of an independent accounting firm to prepare a similar prototype/template. Mr. Salzer and Mr. MacKenzie reported that FFLA will continue

reviewing both proposed documents, with input from grantees, with the goal of finalizing it for use by grantees by January 31, 2026.

NOTE: Use of IOTA Funds Audits are required of all grantees who receive IOTA collections funding from FFLA. The purpose of the audit is to confirm that grantees' use of IOTA funding complies with the Florida Supreme Court's IOTA rule and FFLA's objective standards.

Report of the Grants Committee

A. Civil Legal Aid Summer Fellowships

The Board approved 47 Civil Legal Aid Summer Fellowships designed to allow law students to work for civil legal aid grantees for 10 weeks during the summer while getting paid. The fellowships introduce law students to real experiences with clients, courts, and lawyers engaged in handling civil legal aid issues on behalf of low-income clients. Six fellowships were sponsored by The Florida Bar Family Law Section. This is the third year in a row the Section graciously sponsored fellowships geared toward family law matters.

Grantees requested 49 placements, and 106 law students applied. Staff reviewed all placement requests and student applications. Applicants received points for GPA, bilingual ability, Certified Legal Intern status and their law school year. Staff scored applications based on interest in public interest law, leadership, experience and quality of writing.

The Grants Committee recommended, and the Board approved, funding 47 placements and providing cost-of living stipend adjustments to eight students conditioned upon actual need to be determined by staff during the award process. A copy of staff's report and recommendation and proposed funding worksheet are contained in the Board's meeting materials and available upon request.

B. Loan Repayment Assistance Program (LRAP)

FFLA allocated \$2 million for LRAP loans in calendar year 2026. It received 212 applications from 127 current recipients and 85 new applicants with total requests amounting to \$2,045,600.93. The total amount of student loan debt reported for these 212 applicants was \$37,767,909, which averages \$178,151 per applicant.

The Board approved allocating an additional \$45,600.93, as needed, to fund all eligible applicants. A copy of the report and recommendation and proposed funding worksheet are contained in the Board's meeting materials and available upon request.

C. Board approves December IOTA Distribution Funding

Pursuant to Rule 5-1.1(g)(8), Rules Regulating The Florida Bar, the Board approved distribution of \$119,410,493 to qualified grantee organizations by December 31,

See BOARD, p. 5

2025-26 pro bono grants awarded to 11 organizations

In October, FFLA awarded 11 organizations 2025-26 Pro Bono Support and Enhancement grants, totaling \$3,675,000 in funding. The grants support and enhance pro bono programs and efforts of non-Legal Services Corporation-funded grantees.

CABA Pro Bono Legal Services
\$312,500



Florida Health Justice Project
\$50,000



Legal Aid of Manasota
\$214,000



Gulfcoast Legal Services
\$200,000



Legal Service of Broward County
\$500,000



Crossroads for Florida Kids
\$50,000



Innocence Project of Florida
\$83,500



Legal Aid Society of Orange Cty.
\$700,000



Dade Legal Aid
\$750,000



Jacksonville Area Legal Aid
\$500,000



Legal Aid Society of Palm Beach
\$315,000



BOARD cont.

representing a 32% increase from last year’s December distribution. Two new grantees were added to the network on a trial basis and two were deemed currently ineligible pending completion of Use of IOTA Funds audits.

In line with FFLA’s standard practice, the Board authorized a work group consisting of staff, President Sybesma and Directors Currie, Schwarz and Salzer to review the funding worksheets and resulting distribution chart and make final adjustments to conform to the IOTA rule’s requirements, assuring timely disbursement of funds before December 31, 2025. Staff’s memorandum and recommendations are in the Board’s meeting materials and available upon request.

D. Negotiations with Thomson Reuters/Westlaw

FFLA is reviewing the feasibility of increasing its current program-related expense subsidies for certain technology services it provides to its grantees, namely an existing case management software system (LegalServer) and Westlaw research services. FFLA administers and partially subsidizes a state-wide contract for both of these services at a significantly discounted rate. It is considering increasing the partial subsidy to 100% for these two products.

The Board reviewed Thomson Reuters’ current proposal and

authorized staff to refuse acceptance of such proposal and to continue negotiations with the company to possibly amend its existing contract effective July 1, 2026.

Executive Director Report

Donny MacKenzie delivered a brief report, presenting essential annual information regarding FFLA’s updated schedule of insurance coverage. He also reviewed several important issues relevant to FFLA’s grantees, many of whom attended.

He also provided status reports on various initiatives, including the Use of IOTA Funds audits, recent Grantee Town Hall meetings, the FFLA Grantee Hub, inquiries related to The Florida Bar’s petition to amend the IOTA Rule governing remittance rates, and the ongoing work of the Minimum Annual Distributions work group. He also encouraged input from all stakeholders regarding a proposed new Elder Law Program and expressed his gratitude to the staff for their tireless efforts and unwavering dedication to FFLA’s mission of increasing and improving access to our justice system.

Next Meeting

The Board’s next scheduled meeting will be on March 27, 2026, at Florida State University College of Law.

FFLA distributes \$119 million in IOTA funds

At its December 2025 meeting, the Board of Directors of FFLA, the statewide administrator of Interest on Lawyers' Trust Accounts (IOTA) funds, approved distribution of \$119,621,651 to 35 Florida legal aid organizations for use in 2026.

Individual qualified grantee organizations received, on average, a 39% increase in funding over last year.

"We are immensely proud of the work that IOTA grantees are doing with increased funding," FFLA President Ashley N. Sybesma said. "The additional resources have transformed their capacity to meet community needs, serve more clients and provide comprehensive legal services that ensure thousands more families who would otherwise face legal challenges alone receive representation."

In addition, FFLA used \$3,675,000 in IOTA funds for 11 Pro Bono Support and Enhancement grants in October. (See pg. 5.)

Under the Florida Supreme Court's IOTA rule, interest accumulated on lawyers' short-term trust accounts is donated to the IOTA program to fund legal assistance for the poor.

With approval from the Florida Supreme Court in October, FFLA also placed an additional \$96 million of IOTA collections in a reserve for future distribution to qualified grantee organizations. The goal of FFLA's reserve is to hold a balance that can be used to fund grantees at consistent levels even



Legal aid organizations use IOTA distributions to fund free legal services for individuals and families who might otherwise struggle to afford help.

when interest rates fluctuate, affecting the amount of collections year to year. Steady levels of funding allow grantees to plan more effectively for the future.

A list of the qualified grantee organizations that received funding is on page 7.

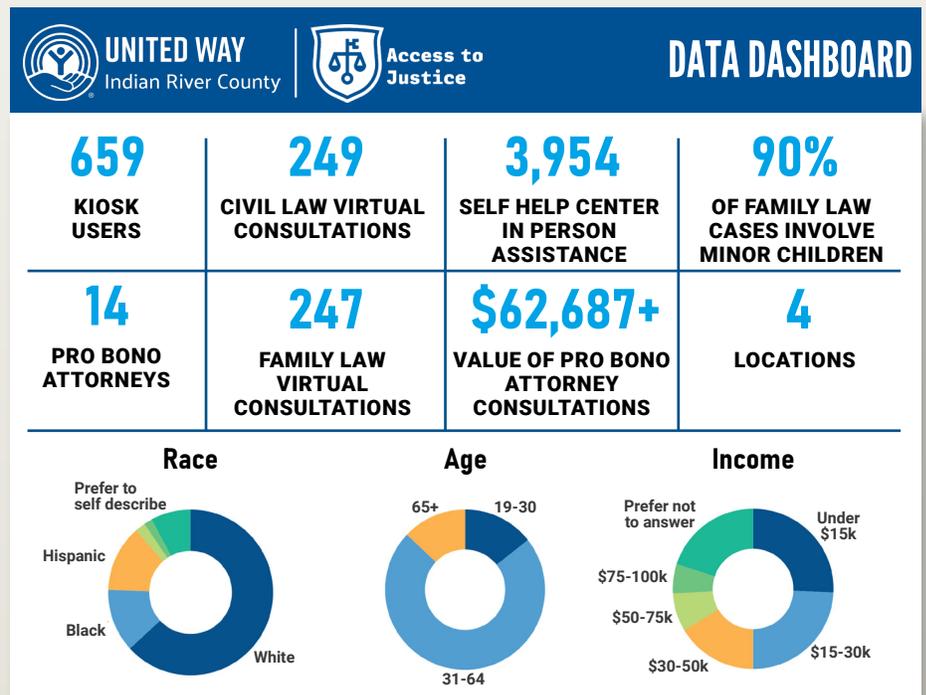
KIOSK cont.

their families. When faced with legal issues, taking time off to address them or navigate the system for answers is almost impossible."

The program hopes to expand to offer more legal help to the citizens of IRC and beyond.

"Our innovative approach has caught the attention of other communities within the state, as well as programs across the country, all eager to learn how we've built such a unique service for our community," Egan said.

"As we enter our second year of service in IRC, the demand for services has grown. However, we are confident that with our expanded site locations and additional staff, we can continue to meet the growing demand for this program."



IOTA distributions fund 35 legal aid organizations

2026 IOTA Distribution Grantees (distributed Dec. 31, 2025, from July 2024 - June 2025 IOTA collections)

Region 1

Legal Aid Foundation of Tallahassee	\$338,447.59
Legal Services of North Florida	\$5,337,032.02
Emerald Coast Legal Aid	\$1,321,645.25

Region 2

Jacksonville Area Legal Aid	\$6,854,587.80
Three Rivers Legal Services	\$3,798,482.07

Region 3

Brevard County Legal Aid	\$3,094,593.07
Community Legal Services	\$11,915,119.67
Legal Aid Society of Orange County Bar Assoc.	\$7,790,368.12
Seminole County Bar Assoc. Legal Aid Society	\$2,507,896.55

Region 4

Bay Area Legal Services	\$9,871,389.92
Community Law Program	\$1,077,622.46
Crossroads for Florida Kids	\$175,000.00
Gulfcoast Legal Services	\$3,691,083.88
Legal Aid of Manasota	\$1,724,790.71
St. Michael's Legal Center	\$1,379,832.26

Region 5

Florida Rural Legal Services	\$2,449,712.91
Heart of Florida Legal Aid Society	\$1,031,907.03
Indian River Legal Aid	\$450,00.00*
Lee County Legal Aid Society	\$1,360,754.99
Legal Aid Society of Palm Beach County	\$8,791,902.91

Region 6

Catholic Legal Services	\$1,101,816.35
Coast to Coast Legal Aid	\$2,938,174.89
Legal Aid Service of Broward County	\$6,659,606.50
Legal Aid Service of Collier County	\$2,237,184.31

Region 7

Catholic Legal Services	\$4,808,577.41
Community Justice Project	\$1,035,368.54
CABA Pro Bono Legal Services	\$2,060,179.81
Dade Legal Aid	\$4,023,789.32
Legal Services of Greater Miami	\$3,600,943.80

Statewide

Florida Health Justice Project	\$1,616,963.59
Florida Legal Services	\$8,666,751.50
Florida's Children First	\$585,430.39
IDignity	\$803,464.86
Innocence Project of Florida	\$1,509,475.18
Lawyers for Children America	\$1,397,662.00
Southern Legal Counsel	\$1,614,093.55

Total \$119,621,651.21**

* Payable in two installments: \$238,842 from FYE 6-30-25 IOTA collections and \$211,158 from FYE 6-30-26 collections as needed.

** The Board committed to funding two currently ineligible grantees if they later become eligible using FYE 6-30-26 IOTA collections.



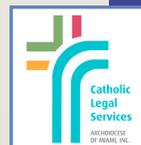
Brevard County Legal Aid helped a mother who had raised her children alone for years. She sought legal help when her children's estranged and indifferent father suddenly sought custody after being pursued for child support. She was able to secure employment and began receiving child support payments. After lengthy litigation, she won custody with an enforceable visitation order.



Crossroads for Florida Kids is a new IOTA distribution grantee. The organization trains and mentors pro bono attorneys to represent children in dependency and delinquency cases in Hillsborough County. Many of their clients are children in foster care who have suffered from abuse, neglect or abandonment.



Indian River Legal Aid is also a new IOTA distribution grantee. The organization provides free civil legal help in areas such as family, housing, consumer law and more. Since their founding, they have facilitated over 100 attorney referrals, valued at more than \$491,735 in free legal help.



In South Florida, Catholic Legal Services, Archdiocese of Miami continues to build capacity to secure public benefits such as SSI, SSDI, and SNAP for their clients who are experiencing homelessness or extreme vulnerability, working to successfully obtain judgments on their behalf.



FUNDING FLORIDA LEGAL AID

175 Lookout Place, Suite 100
Maitland, FL 32751

Non-profit
Organization
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit 273
Orlando, FL

Mission

To increase access
to the justice system
for people of limited means,
FFLA funds legal services,
develops innovative tools
and programs, and supports
legal aid providers
and the courts.

www.FundingFLA.org

CONTACT FFLA
(407) 960-7000



Donation roundup

CY PRES AWARDS

FFLA recently received two cy pres awards. Under cy pres, courts can approve distribution of unclaimed class action funds to a charitable organization that could vindicate class member rights in the future.

After the conclusion of a Capital One consumer data security breach case, Senior U.S. District Judge Anthony J. Trenga, of the Eastern District of Virginia, Alexandria Division, approved a cy pres distribution of \$42,745. FFLA thanks Morgan & Morgan attorney John Yanchunis for his work facilitating the cy pres award.

FFLA also received an \$8,076 cy pres award resulting from residual funds of an ADT Inc. shareholder litigation settlement. Robbins Geller Rudman attorneys helped facilitate the award approved by 15th Judicial Circuit of Florida Judge Donald W. Hafele.

DONATIONS

FFLA is grateful for a recent donation of \$5,000 from Stephen Rappenecker in support of Children's Legal Services. Mr. Rappenecker has been a strong supporter since 1999 and is a member of our Counselor's Society for Lifetime Giving.

For more information or to make a donation, visit FundingFLA.org or contact Development Director Michelle Fonseca at 407-960-7000 or mfonseca@FundingFLA.org.