



Ms. Meredith Kirste, P.A.
7928 U.S. Highway 441, Suite 3
Leesburg, FL 34788

August 2, 2024

Re: St. Luke's Free Medical and Dental Clinic Request for Funding – House Bill 1299
Proposal to North Lake County Hospital District Board

Dear Ms. Kirste and District Board Members:

On behalf of St. Luke's Free Medical and Dental Clinic and the patients we serve, thank you for your previous support of our services. Catholic Charities of Central Florida opened the St. Luke's Free Medical and Dental Clinic in 2010 in partnership with several local healthcare professionals and faith leaders. We continue to focus on providing quality medical and dental care at no cost to men and women who are uninsured, not eligible for Medicaid, and living at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level.

There continues to be a growing need for free medical and dental services in Lake County. According to [countyhealthrankings.org](https://www.countyhealthrankings.org) (2024), 15% of Lake County residents under the age of 65 do not have health insurance. Lack of health insurance makes accessing affordable healthcare difficult, as many doctor's offices do not offer self-pay or sliding fee options. Many of the people without insurance are among the 9.6% (Census.gov) of Lake County residents living in poverty. Sadly, the Health Rankings revealed that 16% of residents report having poor or fair health and 11% report to being in frequent medical distress.

Access to healthcare is further complicated by access to healthcare professionals. [Countyhealthrankings.org](https://www.countyhealthrankings.org) further revealed that there is one primary care physician available for every 1,710 Lake County residents and one dentist for every 2,080 residents. Free and charitable clinics often become the "medical homes" for the uninsured. This is true for 87% of the people looking to St. Luke's as their singular, consistent source of care.

With the continuing high need for services, St. Luke's remains committed to helping our neighbors who are struggling. We rely on volunteer medical and dental providers in order to operate on a minimal budget. We respectfully request \$27,900 in funding from the North Lake County Hospital District to provide free services under HB 1299, Section 6, to cover 180 visits of indigent care for patients who specifically qualify (pursuant to the provisions of the Florida Health Care Responsibility Act (HCRA), Chapter 59H-1).

Thank you again for your past support and for considering this request for continued support of St. Luke's Free Medical and Dental Clinic. You are making a difference in the lives of the patients that turn to the clinic for care.

Sincerely,

Deacon Gary Tester
President

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"For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me." Matthew 25:35-36