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\$1.2 Million Allocated for Mental Health Services in South Florida

Florida State Sen. Shevrin Jones and Florida State Rep. Mike Caruso collaborated for the second consecutive year to secure \$1,200,000 in funding for the Jewish Family Services Affordable Behavioral Health Collaboration, which includes Ferd & Gladys Alpert Jewish Family Service (Alpert JFS), Ruth & Norman Rales Jewish Family Services (Rales JFS), Goodman Jewish Family Services (Goodman JFS), and Jewish Community Services of South Florida (JCS). The Tri-County Jewish Family Services Mental Health Collaboration, which was created last year, will utilize the funding to serve low-income, underprivileged individuals in Broward, Miami-Dade, and Palm Beach counties with mental healthcare.

For the second consecutive year, these funds will provide mental health services to 420 new low-income people dealing with mental health challenges or crises. This number represents an increase over the current year of 20 percent or 6,720 additional visits/service hours. According to Mental Health America, Florida ranks 48th nationwide on access to mental health care. The study also reported that 633,000 Florida adults with mental illness and 116,000 youth with depression had unmet treatment needs.

"Mental health is not a partisan issue, it impacts everyone," said Caruso. "We cannot afford to bury our heads in the sand and ignore the problem because it is not going away and I am more than grateful to these agencies for the hard work they do every single day."

"I am so pleased to be a part of this tremendous coalition and help in any way I can," said Jones. "It's refreshing to see agencies come to us in the legislature with innovative and progressive ways to address critical issues in our communities."

With over \$1 million in funding, the agencies will be able to offer a sliding scale fee structure to ensure that all clients in need will receive care. The target demographic for the initiative is low-income, underprivileged individuals who are uninsured or underinsured and unable to pay the costs associated with



Danielle Hartman



Marc Hopin

receiving mental healthcare. Funding will enable all four agencies to hire additional qualified clinicians who have specialized training in areas such as trauma, domestic violence, substance use, and LGBTQ+.

"We are pleased to collaborate once again with our JFS partners for this Tri-County Mental Health initiative, which will provide our communities with much-needed affordable access to mental health care," said Marc Hopin, CEO of Alpert JFS. "At Alpert JFS, we continue to see huge increases in people coming to us with mental health needs, many of whom, without our agency's help, are unable to afford these services. Thanks to the support and advocacy of our legislative champions, our agency and its partners will be able to reach and respond to thousands of additional people experiencing a mental health crisis."

"I want to thank our legislative champions. We are so fortunate to have such strong advocates of our programs in the state Legislature that are once again committing to serve low-income and underprivileged individuals in South Florida," added Danielle Hartman, president and CEO of Rales JFS. "These dollars will be life-changing for so many who would otherwise go without critical services."