

# **Proposal for a Stop-Gap Measure for COVID Support to the City of Key West**

**Submitted to the Key West City Commission, January 5, 2021**

## **Description of Need**

While there is finally an end in sight to the pandemic, the immediate future remains bleak. As we await the vaccine and the next round of federal aid, our Island's safety nets run thin. The virus still rages, and rapid testing is both limited and expensive. Many frontline employees are forced to pay out of pocket to get quick results. Some avoid getting tested altogether. The CARES Act funds took approximately 10 weeks to reach Monroe County after they were approved, and longer to reach community members. If a similar trend ensues for the most recently approved funds, there is an urgent need to fill the gap between now and that time

There is little help left in our community to meet our residents' basic needs. Our nonprofit organizations have exhausted most of their funds and cannot provide for much longer at this current rate, without additional support. A recent survey conducted by United Way in December 2020 of 13 nonprofit organizations in Key West, (attached), shows a gap in funds to assist residents with rent, food, utilities, medical and other essential needs.

The lack of basic provisions adds to the spread of the virus. When employees can't pay their rent or put food on the table, they are dissuaded from quarantining. There are not sufficient support systems in place to help them, and much of the workforce simply can't afford to lose more income.

The spike in COVID cases, combined with the lapse in funding and protective measures like the eviction moratorium could lead Key West into a tail spin in the coming months. If ever there were a moment to step in and fill the gap, that time is now.

## **A Key West Stop-Gap Plan for COVID (January – end of March 2021)**

The Health and Business Advisory Committee, The Key West Chamber of Commerce and the Nonprofit Community of Key West, and the Inter-Ministerial Alliance joined together in December 2020 to identify measures that would assist the community through the first quarter of 2021. The result is a Five-Part Plan, as follows:

### **1. Free Rapid Testing (\$171, 250)**

According to MCHD data, the numbers of people getting tested in Key West for COVID in a span over three months has more than tripled from 1,426 in September to 4,938 in November 2020. The average wait time for results can be between three to five days. At the same time, many

businesses report that employees are reluctant to get tested for fear of losing desperately needed income. This conundrum creates an urgent need for access to free, rapid and increased testing for COVID in Key West.

The goal of this initiative is to provide free rapid testing and follow up PCR to community members via static and mobile testing sites that are accessible in all areas of the island. Approximately 3,000 kits will be purchased along with PPE, medical supplies and short-term testing staff. The tests will be available to residents of Key West, Stock Island and Key Haven and employees who work in Key West. They will have to provide proof of residence and/or employment to receive the test. The budget breakdown is as follows:

Items	Cost
3,000 Test Kits (Access BIO, BD or Sofia 2)	\$77,250 <sup>1</sup>
5 Testing Staff at \$30 per hour for 10 weeks plus 15% Tax Fringe	\$69,000 <sup>2</sup>
PPE & Medical Supplies – Gloves, Gowns, Masks, Sanitizer Shield	\$5,000
Administrative Costs – Operations, Fiscal Management, Reporting, Staffing,	\$15,000 <sup>3</sup>
Miscellaneous – PR, Ads, Travel, Tents, Tables, Additional Insurances	\$5,000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$171,250</b>

The test kits are for rapid testing only. Standard protocol requires that a PCR test is offered to any person who is negative on the rapid test but presents symptoms of COVID. PRC testing is paid for by insurance or federal funding for the uninsured. Testing sites will provide referrals, and /or on-site PCR testing.

AHEC is a well-placed to manage a rapid testing program in Key West. The organization has been supporting the medical needs of the Keys community for many years, and the staff are deeply involved with MCHD and our residents. AHEC will manage the process and ensure that each location is staffed and stocked in the medical equipment necessary. They will work directly with the City through their existing mechanisms to ensure that the funds are disbursed and tracked as required.

<sup>1</sup> Test kits vary in availability on a daily basis. Bio Test Kits cost \$19.75 each, BD cost \$35.00 and Sofia 2 cost \$26.00. The goal would be to purchase as many Bio Test Kits as possible. The total cost may therefore be less than \$77,250, but will not exceed that amount

<sup>2</sup> This program will utilize licensed health care providers such as Lab Staff, MA's RNs and NPs/Pas. Salary ranges for this staff generally run between \$17 - \$50 per hour.

<sup>3</sup> This sum includes payroll taxes at 7.65% and a small allocation for workman's comp. AHEC normally runs 22 – 25%. This request is much lower.

**2. Emergency Assistance for Rent, Food, Utilities & Essential Needs and Medical (\$262,520)**

According to the United Way ALICE report, prior to COVID-19, approximately 40% of Monroe County were living paycheck to paycheck, unable to make ends meet. (ALICE stands for Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed.) Those living on the edge cannot continue to survive in these times, and are slipping further behind. Our nonprofit organizations are running low on funding to assist.

The recent survey conducted by UWCK in December 2020, (referenced above,) measured the current rate at which 13 nonprofit organizations are providing support in Key West for rent, food, utilities, medical assistance and direct medical services relative to funds remaining for each of those needs. The data showed an overwhelming need and shortage of funds for rental assistance. (See summary data from the survey attached). Based on these needs and the shortfall in funds for the next 2.5 months, the request for funding is as follows:

Items	Cost <sup>4</sup>
Rental Assistance	\$164,000
Food Assistance	\$31,220 <sup>5</sup>
Medical Providers	\$27,300
Utilities and Essential Needs	\$19,000
Administrative Fees (divided amongst the nonprofit organizations)	\$21,000 <sup>6</sup>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$262,520</b>

United Way of Collier and the Keys (UWCK), has been at the forefront of the community with assistance during the pandemic. They are well placed to manage grants in these three areas to the Key West nonprofit community maximizing efficiency of City funds. They have the

<sup>4</sup> The numbers above were derived with the goal of requesting approximately \$200,000 in total for the most important and urgent needs. (The actual need far exceeds that number.) Percentages of need were calculated by dividing the cost of service per month by the total sum remaining for that need, and calculating the approximate percentage of that need relative to the others. The data was adjusted also based on the NGOs capacity to deliver services. (See data attached).

<sup>5</sup> According to our food service organizations (SOS, MCC and FKOC), the current rate of need per month for food assistance is \$150,000. There are \$389,000 remaining in funds. This amount should last for approximately 2.6 months (until the end of March). The lion-share of that funding belongs to SOS. The allocation therefore will be largely dedicated to MCC and FKOC, who are almost out of funding for food. (See data attached).

<sup>6</sup> A standard administration fee for executing a program such as this one typically runs 10% on average. Support to the community in an efficient and accountable manner requires significant staff time and other related expenses. This expense will be shared by all the agencies implementing the grants.

mechanisms in place to identify and vet the needs, distribute funds, track expenses, and ensure accountability. As the lead organization working collaboratively with nonprofit partners, UWCK would also coordinate community outreach, communication and engagement, including specific efforts working with MCHD to directly reach those who are needing to isolate, local business community for their employees and the faith-based community to reach marginalized populations.

### 3. Quarantine Assistance Fund for Businesses (Cost To Be Determined)

While some businesses in Key West are improving, others continue to bear the brunt of the pandemic. Retail, attractions, theaters, restaurants, bars and hotels have suffered grave losses. Many employees are faced with a tradeoff between their health and their financial survival. They simply can't afford to lose more time away from work when they are in quarantine.

A Quarantine Assistance Fund would help promote the safety and financial security of our workforce. The fund would provide employees with a designated amount per day while in quarantine to help make up for lost income. Employees would work directly with a designated organization to manage the process and funds.

The efficacy of this undertaking would depend largely on the ability of a single institution's capacity to administer the funds, track, monitor and ensure accountability. Sister Season Fund has expressed interest in pursuing this initiative, but a full proposal and exploration has yet to be conducted.

This proposal does not include a specific program, but rather a recommendation that the City Commission request City to explore the feasibility of such an initiative.

### 4. Weekly Communication Plan for the Vaccine Rollout (no cost)

As per the suggestion of the Health and Business Advisory Committee, the Mayor and City Manager agreed that there will be a weekly "COVID Information Update" sent out to the community. The updates would include four data points: 1) Number of Tests in Key West for the Week; 2) Number of Positive Cases in Key West for the Week; 3) Estimated Number of Cases in Visitors for the Week (Either from Wastewater Data or National Estimates), and 4) Number of Positive Cases in Key West Schools for the Week .

With the vaccine on the way, the authors of this proposal suggest adding a fifth data point: "Update on the Vaccine." This would include relevant information, (E.g., number of community members who have received the vaccine, timelines, availability and locations, FAQs, Etc.)

**5. Multi-Lingual Information on Resources from Contract Tracers (no cost)**

Many community members in Key West have never needed assistance with life's essential needs until now. Contract tracers are amongst the first group of individuals to typically speak with individuals who have tested positive for COVID and may need resources to support while in quarantine. UWCK has produced a COVID-19 Resource Guide with lists and details about the organizations in our community that provide help with food, rent, utilities, medical needs, etc. The guide was recently translated into Spanish and Creole.

The MCHD has committed to sharing this information with the community through their channels of communication, and have provided a link to Contract Tracers to share with individuals through several outreach methods.

**Summary: A Request for The City Commission to Take Action**

In sum, this proposal outlines five initiatives that will help our community survive the first quarter of 2021. Two of them (points 4 and 5) cost nothing, and do not require the Commission's approval, but would benefit from their endorsement. Two of them (points 1 and 2) require funding; and it is the hope that these items will be voted on and approved by the Commission to prevent further delays in helping meet this need.

**The funding request for Rapid Testing and Emergency Assistance combined through the end of March 2021 is \$380,770.**

Point 3, a Quarantine Assistance Fund, requires additional exploration and the submission of a plan and corresponding budget. Should the Commission wish to proceed, they would request City Staff to submit a proposal.

The first quarter of 2021 will be a critical period in the lives of Key West residents. While we wait for the vaccine, we may struggle now more than ever from a cumulative loss of income, mounting bills, and backlog of overall needs. Our nonprofits cannot continue to bear the burden without significant support. A stop gap measure must be set into place until funds and a vaccine arrive, and we turn the corner for which we have so desperately waited.