

County of Monroe

The Florida Keys



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March 17, 2023

The Honorable Carlos Gimenez
448 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Gimenez,

On behalf of the Monroe County Board of County Commissioners, I write to ask for your support of two Community Project Funding requests. Our first request is for \$6,297,300 from the Fiscal Year 2024 Transportation, and Housing and Urban Development Appropriations bill, Department of Transportation, Airport Improvement Program account to fund the Key West International Airport Passenger Improvement Project. This amount represents 90% of the total project cost of \$6,997,000, which is the statutory cost-share under the Airport Improvement Program for Small Hub airports.

As you know, we have begun a \$100 million renovation and expansion of the Key West International Airport (EYW) to completely transform the airport. However, there is a portion of the project that remains unfunded: key additional investments to further improve the passenger experience. This request will fund advancements in areas that are still lacking, including structural (leaking windows and doors) and modal upgrades (methods for processing passengers through the facility).

This project encompasses expansion and modernization of the pre-security public waiting area, passenger ticketing lobby, and outbound baggage security space to increase capacity and efficiency, while also upgrading the existing structure to meet current building/hurricane code requirements and improve building resiliency and energy efficiency. The current building was constructed in 2008 and improvements are necessary to expand and upgrade the structure for increased passenger and baggage processing, meet current code requirements, and improve overall building resiliency. Improvements include the following components:

- Expanded building space of roughly 4,025 square feet to the east end of the building that includes:
 - Expanded public circulation/waiting and passenger ticketing space;
 - Expanded outbound baggage security/screening and makeup space;
 - Upgraded passenger ticketing, baggage check, and flight display technology;
 - Upgraded entry/exit doors and openings to meet current storm code requirements;
 - Upgraded HVAC equipment including increased system filtration, and UV-C virus contaminant mitigation; and
 - Added entry/exit vestibules to significantly reduce energy loss and improve overall building pressurization and efficiency/resiliency.

Our second request is for \$1,995,000 from the Fiscal Year 2024 Transportation, and Housing and Urban Development Appropriations bill, Housing and Urban Development, Economic Development Initiative account to fund a portion of the construction of a new Senior Center on Big Pine Key.

The existing Big Pine Key Senior Center and Congregate Meal Site was heavily damaged during Hurricane Irma in 2017. Initial repairs were made; however, significant structural damage remained. While the building was closed during COVID, additional assessments were completed and it was determined that the building was no longer safe for use. Therefore, since March 2020, seniors in Big Pine Key have been without a permanent Senior Center. However, because Big Pine Key has such a dense population of seniors and the need for services is so great, we have set up a temporary facility that only provides a small group of seniors lunch each day. This is not meeting the needs of the community or matching the offerings that we deliver at other County Senior Centers.

Apart from the temporary site in Big Pine Key, Monroe County has three Senior Center/Congregate Meal Sites in Key West, Marathon, and Key Largo that serve as meeting places and hubs for our seniors to congregate. A fourth site in Plantation Key is under construction.

Typically, each Senior Center in the County offers a variety of services, including daily hot lunches, socialization activities, and an organized meeting space for community groups to assist and serve our seniors (i.e., Older American's Advisory Board, AARP, Quilting Club, Garden Club, Computer Club, Line Dancers, SHINE, AmeriCorps VISTA, Department of Health, Coast Guard Auxiliary, Emergency Management Community Trainings, Alzheimer's Disease Initiative Caregiver Group Training Seminars). These organizations provide services, information, and benefits to our elderly population, including tax preparation, Medicare benefit assistance enrollment, public assistance enrollment or changes, social and recreational activities, training and educational opportunities, neighborhood health benefits, and hurricane preparedness information and training, among others. Transportation is available to our seniors who wish to attend and are unable to drive on their own. Due to our temporary Big Pine Key facility, these senior activities are scattered among several ad hoc locations, including churches and community parks, all of which have limited facilities and availability, and cannot always accommodate the senior events.

The County will demolish the uninhabitable facility in Big Pine Key and build a new 2,500 square foot Senior Center and Congregate Meal Site on the same site. The total cost of the demolition and new construction is \$2,660,000; the County seeks 75 percent via this request.

Thank you for your consideration of our important requests. We look forward to working with you on these and other issues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "RGT", is positioned above the typed name.

Roman Gastesi
Monroe County Administrator