



Marion County Board of County Commissioners

McPherson Governmental Campus

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District 1 - Craig Curry, Commissioner
District 2 - Kathy Bryant, Chairman
District 3 - Matt McClain, Commissioner
District 4 - Carl Zalak III, Vice Chair
District 5 - Michelle Stone, Commissioner

December 23, 2024

RE: Estella Byrd Whitman Wellness and Community Resource Center

To Whom it May Concern,

I am writing on behalf of the Marion County Board of County Commissioners (Marion County) to express our strong support for the Estella Byrd Whitman Wellness and Community Resource Center (EBWCHC) in its 2025 Appropriations Project Request from the Florida House of Representatives.

Since opening its doors in 2018, EBWCHC has provided healthcare to more than 3,500 residents. As one of the only primary care providers located in the federally declared medical desert of the West Ocala (34475) community, the center delivers essential primary care services to residents who would otherwise lack access. The center addresses significant barriers such as transportation, lack of financial resources, and other socioeconomic disparities affecting many of the residents they serve.

While the center does not directly provide specialty care, it collaborates effectively with community partners to offer dental, behavioral health, career development, and other vital services. EBWCHC has successfully developed partnerships and participates in community collaboratives to meet the healthcare needs of Marion County's most vulnerable residents. EBWCHC, located in Ocala—a city of approximately 65,478 people (US Census Bureau 2022)—plays a vital role in addressing these gaps in care.

The proposed service area, covering zip codes 34475, 34482, and 34479, is critically underserved by the Health Center Program. These areas represent a population of 52,007 residents, including 21,474 low-income individuals. Despite the presence of two health centers, they are only able to serve 8.16% of the total population and 19.77% of the low-income residents, leaving 17,229 low-income individuals without access to essential healthcare services.

Marion County considers EBWCHC's provision of affordable healthcare services to be invaluable to our community. EBWCHC is a highly regarded medical clinic, supported by dedicated board members, staff, and community stakeholders, all committed to continuously improving access to care and expanding patient services.

EBWCHC has the full support of Marion County in their pursuit of the funding under the 2025 Appropriations Project.

Sincerely,

Kathy Bryant
Chair, Marion County Board of County Commissioners