

# *Why Did a Charity Tied to Casey DeSantis Suddenly Get a \$10 Million Boost?*

The Hope Florida Foundation quietly gave the money to two nonprofit political committees that helped Gov. Ron DeSantis and his allies defeat a ballot measure.



Listen to this article · 8:49 min [Learn more](#)



**By Patricia Mazzei**

Reporting from Miami

April 24, 2025

A charity meant to help people stay off public assistance was the signature project of Florida's popular first lady, Casey DeSantis. But over three years, it had managed to raise only about \$2 million to help struggling families in Florida.

Then last fall, a \$10 million windfall suddenly arrived from an unlikely source: a Medicaid contractor embroiled in a case of overbilling.

Within weeks, the money was gone — not to churches or other groups helping the needy. Instead, the Hope Florida Foundation quietly funneled it to two nonprofit political committees that helped Gov. Ron DeSantis and his allies defeat a November ballot measure that would have legalized marijuana.

The mystery of the \$10 million — and how it ended up being used to help the governor's political aims — has engulfed Mr. DeSantis and his wife in a growing scandal in Florida. Republican state lawmakers and news reporters are investigating the money trail just as Mr. and Ms. DeSantis are mulling whether she should run for governor next year to succeed her husband.

Ms. DeSantis has made the Hope Florida initiative central to her public persona since she started the program in 2021. Hope Florida connects low-income families with churches and local groups that might help them with housing, food or other needs so that they do not seek government assistance; the Hope Florida Foundation is its nonprofit fund-raising arm.

“Hope Florida is a philosophy,” Ms. DeSantis said in St. Augustine, Fla., on Thursday at an event with the governor trumpeting the initiative’s achievements. “It shows we can help people in need.”

Members of the governor’s own party see other motives, and they’re sounding alarms.

At the State Capitol in Tallahassee on Thursday, State Representative Alex Andrade, a Pensacola Republican who was leading the investigation for the House, referred to what happened with the \$10 million as a potential “conspiracy to commit money laundering and wire fraud.”

The DeSantis administration disputes that the \$10 million was Medicaid funding, which is highly regulated. But it was part of a settlement after the Medicaid contractor, Centene, overbilled the state. An early draft of the settlement agreement obtained by The Miami Herald and The Tampa Bay Times showed that Centene had overbilled by about \$67 million — the total amount that the company repaid Florida last fall, including the \$10 million that went to the foundation.

“It is readily apparent that a culture of neglect, incompetence and entitlement exists within the halls of the governor’s office at this time,” Mr. Andrade said.

Such has been the split-screen existence of Mr. and Ms. DeSantis and state lawmakers this spring as Republicans have, for the first time since the governor took office in 2019, taken an adversarial stance toward him. Mr. DeSantis has dismissed the investigation as a political attack by detractors “threatened” by his wife.

“This is an attempt to try to manufacture a narrative where there’s really nothing there,” Mr. DeSantis said on Wednesday. “They want to try to impugn our Hope Florida program. That’s why they’re doing it. It’s all political.”

Neither state nor federal prosecutors have announced any investigations. Mr. Andrade abruptly ended his subcommittee’s investigation on Thursday after two witnesses — the directors of the political committees that received the \$10 million — declined to voluntarily testify.

Still, unresolved questions about the money will most likely persist, especially if Ms. DeSantis decides to run.

A lawyer for the Agency for Health Care Administration, Florida’s Medicaid regulator, has denied that the \$10 million came from Medicaid. In a letter to Mr. Andrade’s committee this week, the agency said that Centene had identified about \$57 million in overbilled funds and had provided the additional \$10 million as reimbursement “for any other potentially alleged damages,” and as an incentive to settle.

On Thursday, Mr. Andrade questioned why Centene would agree to such terms when it had not done so in other states. He also noted that Florida was using the \$67 million total to calculate the share of returned Medicaid funds that it had to hand over to the federal government, which splits Medicaid costs with states.

The DeSantis administration is required to notify state lawmakers about such settlements. Legislators were notified about the \$57 million paid to the Agency for Health Care Administration, but not about the \$10 million payment to the Hope Florida Foundation.

Such a windfall was unheard-of for the Hope Florida Foundation, according to Mr. Andrade. Of the \$2 million it had raised before last fall, it had given out about \$500,000 in grants, mostly ranging from \$10,000 to \$20,000. A fund within the Hope Florida Foundation gives grants “to deserving local nonprofit organizations dedicated to meeting the needs of students and families,” according to Hope Florida’s website.

That was not the case with the \$10 million payment from Centene.

After the settlement was signed in September, the Hope Florida Foundation in October gave its \$10 million away to two nonprofit political committees known as “dark money” groups because they do not have to release detailed reports of their finances. Half went to Secure Florida’s Future, which is run by the Florida Chamber of Commerce. The other \$5 million went to Save Our Society From Drugs, which seeks to prevent drug use. The grant proposals submitted by the two groups did not detail how the money would be spent.

With limited financial disclosure requirements, it is impossible to track exactly how the funds were used. But that same month, the two groups routed a total of \$8.5 million to Keep Florida Clean, a political action committee created to oppose Amendment 3, the ballot measure that would have legalized marijuana.

Nonprofit organizations such as the Hope Florida Foundation are limited in how much they can contribute to political causes or risk losing their tax-exempt status; Mr. Andrade said the payments from the Hope Florida Foundation “far exceed” the charity’s spending limits on lobbying and campaigns.

Between October and December, Keep Florida Clean sent \$10.5 million to the Republican Party of Florida and \$1.1 million to the Florida Freedom Fund, Mr. DeSantis’s PAC. Both the state party and Mr. DeSantis’s PAC spent money opposing Amendment 3, which they argued would hurt Floridians’ quality of life.

At the time, Keep Florida Clean and the Florida Freedom Fund were both run by James Uthmeier, who was Mr. DeSantis’s chief of staff. In February, Mr. DeSantis appointed him as the state’s attorney general. He has denied any wrongdoing.

“These ridiculous accusations are false and not based on any judicial finding or evidentiary record,” his spokesman, Jeremy T. Redfern, said in a statement on Thursday.

Mr. Uthmeier told reporters this week that he “was not involved” in the settlement negotiations. Text messages obtained by the House investigation showed he informed at least one of the two “dark money” groups about the \$10 million and

urged them to solicit the Hope Florida Foundation for the money even before the charity's board knew about it.

Mr. Uthmeier dismissed Mr. Andrade, who supported Amendment 3, as “somebody doing the bidding of Big Marijuana.” “I feel good about what we did” to defeat the ballot measure, Mr. Uthmeier added.

In a recent legislative hearing, Joshua Hay, the chairman of the Hope Florida Foundation board, said there had been bookkeeping lapses and other errors and pledged to push for more transparency. The executive director of Hope Florida resigned last week. So did a board member of the Hope Florida Foundation.

“The governor's the only one that has not been able to answer any of the criticism that has come through Hope Florida,” Daniel Perez, the Republican House speaker, told reporters last week. “All he does is deflect with lies and stories that never happened instead of just owning it.”

**Patricia Mazzei** is the lead reporter for The Times in Miami, covering Florida and Puerto Rico.

---

A version of this article appears in print on , Section A, Page 1 of the New York edition with the headline: How \$10 Million Quietly Crept From DeSantis Wife's Charity