**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**August 29, 2023**

**Els for Autism Foundation® thanks Senator Gayle Harrell and Representative John Snyder for their advocacy during the 2023 Legislative Session –**

**$1 million appropriation secured to help advance the mission of Els for Autism®**

Today, at a ceremony on the campus of The Els Center of Excellence®, leaders and supporters of the Els for Autism Foundation recognized Senator Gayle Harrell and Representative John Snyder for their efforts in successfully advocating for a $1 million appropriation to support the construction of a specialized autism recreation complex on the 26-acre campus located in Jupiter, Florida.

“The Els for Autism Foundation staff and board of directors would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to Senator Harrell and Representative Snyder for their support in securing this appropriation in the state budget for the 2023-2024 fiscal year,’ said Dr. Michael Alessandri, Chairman of the Board of the Els for Autism Foundation. “We are also grateful to the entire Florida Legislature and Governor Ron DeSantis for approving this item in the state budget.”

“These funds will allow us to build on our mission of transforming the lives of people with autism by providing a full range of recreation choices,” said Dr. Marlene Sotelo, Executive Director of the Els for Autism Foundation. “This complex will include a purpose-built, sensory-friendly gymnasium and an aquatics center that will include a swimming pool and splash pad.”

“South Florida is surrounded by water, and the frequency of elopement and wandering behaviors of people with autism is heightened by the multitude of water access. Unfortunately, drowning is the number one cause of death for kids with autism, and programs designed to prevent these tragic events are essential to this community. Water safety and swim lessons will be a core feature of our program offerings at the Aquatics Center,” said Dr. Sotelo.

“Since starting the Els for Autism Foundation programs and services in 2015, it has always been our vision to provide the autism community with a robust offering of sports, fitness, arts, leisure, and healthy living programs,” said Liezl Els, Founder and Managing Director of the Els for Autism Foundation. “We are very grateful to our legislators for helping us get one step closer to making this dream a reality.”

**About Els for Autism Foundation®**

Established in 2009 by World Golf Hall of Famer Ernie Els, his wife Liezl, and honorary chairman Marvin R. Shanken, the Els for Autism Foundation is dedicated to transforming the lives of individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and their caregivers through comprehensive lifespan services and collaborative partnerships. Els for Autism has provided services to families and professionals in 26 countries around the globe. In addition to its U.S. location, Els for Autism has foundations in Canada, South Africa, and the United Kingdom.

For more information, please visit [ElsforAutism.org](http://www.ElsforAutism.org).

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