

# A worthy cause

**Our position:** The effort by a Windermere couple to reduce suicides deserves lawmakers' support.

The courage of a Windermere couple has given the Florida Legislature the precious opportunity to save lives by curbing Florida's skyrocketing suicide rate.

Twice as many people kill themselves in Florida than are murdered each year. In 2003, there were 2,294 suicides, according to the state Bureau of Vital Statistics, which reports that the trend has dramatically increased in the past decade, mostly among children as young as middle-schoolers.

Frank and Judy Buonauro experienced the pain of suicide firsthand when their son, Michael, took his life last year. The couple turned unspeakable grief into remarkable action by asking Florida Hospital to find a proven suicide-prevention program for schools.

The program they settled on is called Signs of Suicide — S.O.S. —

and it is credited with reducing suicides by 40 percent in Massachusetts. It helps high-school students spot suicide danger signs. The Buonauros spent \$100,000 to bring it to Orange County schools.

At West Orange High School, six people — five students and a parent who read information their child brought home — sought help within days of S.O.S.'s start.

Now the Buonauros are asking lawmakers to act. Rep. Sandy Adams is sponsoring a bill with Sen. Dan Webster to spend \$600,000 a year for 10 years to fund the program in Orange, Osceola, Seminole and Brevard counties with an eye toward expanding it statewide.

That's a small price to pay to save the lives of hundreds of students — a much smaller price than that paid by the Buonauros.