

# Monroe County commissioners exclude \$1,800 grant to Seven Oaks Classical School on 2–1 vote

Dave Askins

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Monroe County commissioners from left: Lee Jones, Julie Thomas, and Jody Madeira. (Dave Askins, Nov. 13, 2025)

It's normally a perfunctory step by Monroe County's board of commissioners—the approval of contracts with nonprofits who receive funding from Monroe County's Sophia Travis community service grant awards program.

But this year, county commissioners separated out one of the recommended contracts, for an \$1,800 award to Seven Oaks Classical School, and voted 2–1 to exclude the school's award. Seven Oaks is a charter school and a [501\(c\)\(3\) nonprofit](#).

Voting at their regular Thursday meeting to exclude Seven Oaks were commissioners Julie Thomas and Lee Jones. Voting against the exclusion (thus *for* the contract with Seven Oaks) was Jody Madeira.

The reason given by Thomas for the exclusion was the status of Seven Oaks as a charter school, and the conflict the school had with county government during the COVID-19 epidemic over face mask policies.

Reached by The B Square, Seven Oaks headmaster Stephen Shipp said, “To say that we are surprised and disappointed is an understatement.” Shipp said the school had asked for a modest amount amount of money in line with the purpose of the Sophia Travis grant program.

One project for which Seven Oaks had asked for funding would have supported children in food-insecure households—by sending food home for the weekend through Backpack Blessings. The other project would have helped bridge a gap left by the state of Indiana, when it capped subsidies covering AP (advanced placement) test fees for students in need.

Sophia Travis grant contracts are usually a straightforward approval for county commissioners—because the awards come to the commissioners recommended by the county council, the county government’s fiscal body. And the substantive deliberations and review are undertaken by a committee established by the council.

This year, the committee was composed of council members Jennifer Crossley, Liz Feitl, and Trent Deckard, along with community members Jenny Stevens and Julie Robertson. They reviewed over 46 applications this year.

The move by Thomas to put the exclusion of Seven Oaks to a vote came after a bit of a grumble by the county council two weeks ago, when the fiscal body voted to approve the Sophia Travis grant award recommendations, which [totaled about \\$174,000](#). Councilor Peter Iversen said, “My concern is that as charter schools—and the way that Indiana approaches charter schools—they increasingly have access to state funding. So for future iterations of this, I’d want to be careful with that.”

There two charter schools with grant applications recommended by the county council—Seven Oaks and The Project School. There’s a political divide on the question of public taxpayer support for charter schools, and most Democrats oppose that support. All three Monroe County commissioners are Democrats.

To explain her move to exclude Seven Oaks from the Sophia Travis grant awards, at Thursday’s meeting Thomas pointed to the fact that Seven Oaks is a charter school, and that the school and the county government had been at odds over mask policies during the COVID pandemic.

Thomas put it like this: “For me, this is not only a situation where we have a school that is taking money from public taxpayer dollars, but also one that saw fit to sue us during [the COVID pandemic].”

Thomas continued, “And they did not work well with county health [department] during that crisis, and I didn’t appreciate that.” Thomas added, “But mostly it’s because of the source of their funding for me.”

Shipp, the Seven Oaks headmaster, said that to allow a dispute about the masking policy during the pandemic from five years ago to affect a decision about the provision of nutritional support for children is “nothing less than shocking.”

After Thursday’s meeting, Madeira told The B Square that she agreed in principle with Thomas’s objection based on charter school funding, but looked at the specific project that the \$1,800 was meant to support—which was food for students in need and AP (advanced placement) test fees for students in need. It was the specific project, which supported specific kinds of students, that led Madeira to support approval of the contract with Seven Oaks.

Madeira added that she would have also agreed with an objection in principle to *general* support for another charter school on the award list, The Project School. But Madeira said she supports the special education services for children in need that the Project School grant is supposed to pay for. No motion was made at Thursday’s meeting to exclude the Project School from the grant award contracts.

It was councilor Liz Feitl who presented the agenda item to the commissioners at their meeting—she served on the committee that reviewed the applications.

Feitl told commissioners, “As I remember with the discussions we had with the committee, it was for food for the kids, right? So I know people who go [to Seven Oaks], and their children go there, and some of the people that go there struggle financially themselves. So this was to help kids that go to the school with funding for food, as I understand it.”

Thomas responded to the idea that the grant funding to Seven Oaks would pay for food by pointing out that there were other awards on the list that fund food—a grant to Pantry 279 for \$13,800.

After the contract with Seven Oaks was excluded, the motion to approve the rest of the contracts passed on a 3–0 vote.

Reached after the meeting by the B Square, county council president Jennifer Crossley told The B Square that there is a Sophia Travis committee meeting on [Friday \(Nov. 14\)](#) to debrief and review how things went this year. At the committee meeting, Crossley said, the exclusion of Seven Oaks would be an obvious topic of discussion.

Crossley said that she appreciated the fact that the commissioners had approved most of the recommended contracts. She continued, “However, it is frustrating to learn that the contract for Seven Oaks was voted down 2-1.”

From her perspective as chair of the Sophia Travis grants committee, Crossley said the committee discussed the application from Seven Oaks “in great detail” and wanted to support the application, because it was to help feed children at the school who qualify for free or reduced lunch.

Crossley added, “What is particularly disappointing is that one of the reasons for this decision [by commissioners] was a lawsuit and the claim that Seven Oaks ‘didn’t work well with the county’ during COVID.”

The lawsuit that Thomas mentioned stemmed from a citation issued in 2021 by the Monroe County health department against Seven Oaks for noncompliance with an order on facemasks during the COVID-19 pandemic. The school [appealed the citation](#) to the county commissioners, which was denied. The school then filed a [complaint](#) with the Monroe County circuit court.

In May 2022, the court ultimately found in favor of Monroe County government on the grounds that the executive order of the governor was no longer in effect and that the request for relief from the health department's enforcement of the local order based on the executive order had become moot.

Crossley said that the vote to exclude Seven Oaks “feels like a governmental vendetta against them due to their previous history.” Crossley added, “This situation reminds me of the Trump administration's approach to withholding funds for SNAP benefits due to political reasons.”

Crossley alluded to the public statement that one of the commissioners reads aloud at the start of their regular meetings, saying, “It is absurd that, during every meeting, they read a commitment to protect people regardless of factors like ‘economic status,’ yet they turn around and vote the way they did this morning.”

Crossley concluded, “At the end of the day, their vote just hurt children who could have benefited from the initiatives of the proposed backpack program.”

**2025 Sophia Travis Community Service Grants**

<b>Organization</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Amount</b>
Pantry 279	Help with the Increasing Need	\$13,800
Tandem Community Birth Center and Postpartum House, Inc	Tandem Essential Funding	\$9,640
New Hope for Families	Making Homelessness Brief for Children	\$7,800
Hoosier Hills Food Bank	Fall & Holiday Food Purchasing	\$6,400
South Central Community Action Agency (SCCAP)	Covering Kids and Families Winter Resource Fair and Community Outreach	\$6,300
Boys & Girls Clubs of Bloomington	Replacing Cameras at BGCB – Ellettsville Club	\$6,200
Community Kitchen of Monroe County, Inc.	Essential Programs Food Purchase	\$5,600
Grace Center, Inc.	Food Purchase	\$5,600
WonderLab Museum of Science, Health & Technology	Support for Social Service Organization Accessibility to the WonderLab Museum	\$5,500
Girls Inc. of Monroe County	Mind + Body: Building Resilience and Wellness for Girls	\$5,450
Bloomington Meals on Wheels, Inc	Hotboxes for Monroe County Expansion	\$5,445
The Project School	Emergency Shortage for Special Education Services	\$5,400
People and Animal Learning Services	Equipt Equine-Assisted Learning Program for MC Youth Services Bureau	\$5,280
St. Vincent de Paul	Solving a Bed Frame Storage	\$5,200
Second Baptist Church	SBC Feed the Needy	\$4,700
Beacon, Inc. (Shalom Community Center)	Dignity in an Emergency	\$4,505
Amethyst House	Residential Food	\$4,200
Big Brothers Big Sisters of South Central Indiana	One-to-One Plus Digital Initiative: Advancing Mentoring with Technology	\$4,100
Bloomington Food Policy Council	People's United Garden	\$3,890
Community Kitchen/CPR Btown	Non-profit CPR training project	\$3,660
Planned Parenthood	Bloomington Health Center Operations	\$3,600
Pathways	Supporting Nutritional Access for Compass Early Learning Center Families	\$3,500
Cancer Support Community South Central Indiana	Food and Transportation Assistance for Cancer Patients	\$3,480
My Sister's Closet	Providing a Secure Resource for Women	\$3,462
Catholic Charities Bloomington (CCB) Counseling Services	Affordable Therapy for Low-Income Children and Youth	\$3,420
Ivy Tech Community College	Ivy Tech Hive and Harvest Food Pantry	\$3,350
Monroe County Humane Association	Critical Pet Care for Vulnerable Monroe County Families	\$3,350
Wheeler Mission -- Bloomington	Building Community Within Wheeler Mission -- Bloomington's Day Room	\$3,236
New Leaf New Life	Re-entry Transportation Support	\$3,210
Exodus Refugee Immigration, Inc	Refugee Emergency Assistance	\$2,800
Sobremesa Foundation, Inc	Increasing Access to Nutritious Food	\$2,700
Community Culture Inc	Bob's Garden: A Food Oasis for Monroe County	\$2,666
Courage to Change Sober Living	Wrap Around Move In (Rental Scholarships)/Move Out Help for Residents	\$2,400
Stone Belt Arc (Milestones Division)	Milestones Play Therapy	\$2,300
Restore/Habitat for Humanity Monroe County	Feeding Our Volunteers Program	\$2,236
Protect Our People: Connect, Ltd	The Front Door 2026 Pop-Up Events	\$2,100
Harrodsburg Heritage Days Inc	Harrodsburg Heritage Days Festival	\$2,000
Middle Way House, Inc	Supporting Survivors by Providing Comprehensive Resources & Support	\$2,000
<b>Seven Oaks Classical School</b>	<b>Seven Oaks Student Priority Needs</b>	<b>\$1,800</b>
Stinesville Community Library	Stinesville Community Library Website & Youth Program Expansion	\$1,400
Constellation Stage & Screen	Constellation for Schools Student Matinee Program	\$1,300
Hands Full of Hope Inc	N/A - Stock for Mobile Boutique Project	\$800
Writing for A Change	Friday Night Writes!	\$800
Writers Guild at Bloomington	First Sunday Prose Reading Series	\$420