

RESOLUTION 06-70

A RESOLUTION RELATING TO CONTRACTUAL
INDEMNIFICATION BY THE COUNTY.

WHEREAS, Pinellas County frequently enters into contractual relationships;

WHEREAS, these contracts vary from purchase orders to multimillion dollar contracts, to interlocal agreements;

WHEREAS, the County generally requires other contracting parties to indemnify the County for the negligence both of the contractor and of the County;

WHEREAS, many parties refuse to indemnify the County for the actions or inactions of the County and often seek to require the County to indemnify them for the actions of the County, its contractors, or third parties;

WHEREAS, the nature of the party, and the subject matter of the contract are factors in the County's decision making regarding risk assumption and indemnification;

WHEREAS, the County usually has refused to indemnify other entities for several reasons: 1) The County is entitled to sovereign immunity under the Florida Constitution and §768.28, Fla. Stat., and an indemnification could be interpreted as a contractual waiver of that sovereign immunity; 2) The Florida Constitution prohibits a County from pledging its credit to another entity and the indemnification could be viewed as a pledge of the County's credit; 3) Article VII Section 10 of the Florida Constitution, and §§129.06 and 129.07, Fla. Stats. require that a County limit its expenditures to the budgeted amounts, and contracts requiring expenditures in violation of these statutes are not only void,

but subject the commissioners voting and contracting for such amounts, and their individual bonds, to liability for any excess indebtedness contracted for; 4) §§129.08 and 129.09, Fla. Stats. provide for criminal liability for commissioners knowingly voting for such expenditures, and the clerk of the circuit court signing any payment thereon;

WHEREAS, currently various individuals make determinations relative to these indemnification or risk assumption decisions based on the nature, size, necessity or desirability of the agreement at issue;

WHEREAS, in advising various departments and bodies regarding these indemnification or risk assumption matters, the County Attorney's Office has caused the phrase, "to the extent permitted by law" to be added to clauses wherein the County purports to indemnify another entity;

WHEREAS, the County Attorney's Office interpretation has been that due to all of the constraints listed above, "the extent permitted by law" is – not at all, and that the indemnification of another entity is a void *ab initio* action with no effect;

WHEREAS, certain legal precedents have come out that could be construed to undermine the County Attorney's Office interpretation;

WHEREAS, American Home Assurance Company v. National Railroad Passenger Corporation, 908 So.2d 459 (Fla. 2005) (*holding that a municipality could contractually be held liable under an indemnification provision despite sovereign immunity defenses raised*), and Florida Department of Natural Resources v. Garcia, 753 So.2d 72 (Fla. 2000) (*holding that the City of*

Miami could indemnify the State of Florida despite a statutory provision that prohibits one governmental entity from indemnifying a second governmental entity for the second entity's negligence) are two cases that raise potential problems for the interpretation previously relied upon by the County Attorney's Office;

WHEREAS, the County Attorney's Office has been in contact with other County Attorney's Offices, reviewed the widely varying policies thereof, and has researched and discussed the matter internally;

WHEREAS, it is the opinion of the County Attorney's Office that the most conservative and safest course of action is to never indemnify another party;

WHEREAS, as a practical matter, it is sometimes necessary, to achieve policy goals that are in the best interests of the County, to take on the risk of such an indemnity provision; and

WHEREAS, the Board of County Commissioners hereby finds that there is a need for the County to implement a uniform policy and methodology for the review of matters relating to contractual risk assumption or indemnification of other entities by the County.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED by the Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners as follows:

I. The County Policy is that the County does not indemnify other parties. That Policy may only be waived based on certain factors such as:

- 1) the availability of the goods or services from other sources;
- 2) the County's need/desire for the goods or services;
- 3) the probability of a loss occurring.

II. County policy not to indemnify others should not be waived lightly and when done, shall conform to the following requirements:

- 1) The other entity must have refused, in writing, to remove all indemnification requirements requested of the County directly, and refused to allow a statement that each party be responsible for its own negligence to take the place of the indemnification provision.
- 2) No indemnification by the County for the acts of any entity other than the County, its Governing Body, or its employees shall be approved. Particularly, no contract shall be entered into that requires the indemnification for acts or omissions of third parties, or third party agents of the County.
- 3) County indemnification of a party shall specifically be limited to the lesser of the contract amount, or the limits of sovereign immunity under §768.28, Florida Statutes (~~\$100,000/\$200,000~~). 200,000/300,000 Recovery shall be limited contractually to the actual damages incurred as a result of County's sole negligence. No recovery of attorney's fees and costs should be permitted.
- 4) County indemnification shall specifically be limited to traditional liabilities for which the County could be held liable under common law interpreting the limited waiver of sovereign immunity (i.e. no waiver of sovereign immunity for planning functions or otherwise). Language shall also be included that states that any claim must comply with the procedures found in §768.28, Fla. Stat. for such tort claims.
- 5) County indemnification requires specific individual review through the contract review process which must include, at a minimum, the Clerk of the Circuit Court, the County Attorney's Office, the County Risk Management Department, and the County Administrator's Office.

III. To the extent possible, and after consideration as outlined above, the following language is to be used for the County to indemnify another party (Contractor):

County hereby agrees to indemnify the Contractor for claims brought against the Contractor only to the extent that they are found to result from the sole negligence of the County, its governing body, or its employees. This indemnification shall not be construed to be an indemnification for the acts, or omissions of third parties, independent contractors or third party agents of the County. This indemnification shall not be construed as a waiver of the County's sovereign immunity, and shall be interpreted as limited to only such traditional liabilities for which the County could be liable under the common law interpreting the limited waiver of sovereign immunity. Any claims against the County must comply with the procedures found in §768.28, Florida Statutes. In order to comply with the requirements of §129.06, Florida Statutes, and Article VII,

section 10 of the Florida Constitution, the value of this indemnification is limited to the lesser of the amount payable by either party under the substantive provisions of this Agreement, or the limitations of §768.28, Florida Statutes. In addition, this indemnification shall be construed to limit recovery by the indemnified party against the County to only those damages caused by County's sole negligence, and specifically not include any attorney's fees or costs associated therewith.

IV. Notwithstanding any contractual authority delegation to the contrary, any indemnification provisions entered into by the County other than that listed in paragraph III. may only be entered into at the specific direction of the County Administrator or his designee, and only after review by the County Attorney's Office. Any indemnity provision entered into pursuant to this subsection IV shall be reported to the Board of County Commissioners in arrears no less than quarterly.

Commissioner Morroni offered the foregoing resolution and moved its adoption, which was seconded by Commissioner Seel, and upon roll call the vote was:

AYES: Duncan, Stewart, Harris, Seel, and Morroni.

NAYS: None.

ABSENT AND NOT VOTING: Welch and Latvala.

APPROVED AS TO FORM
OFFICE OF COUNTY ATTORNEY



Attorney