



Pinellas County

Staff Report

File #: 16-1372A, Version: 1

Subject:

Legal Aid Services Agreement with Gulfcoast Legal Services, Inc.

Recommended Action:

Approve the Legal Aid Services Agreement with Gulfcoast Legal Services, Inc. (Gulfcoast Legal) to provide legal assistance to eligible County residents whose household income does not exceed 150% of federal poverty guidelines.

Strategic Plan:

Ensure Public Health, Safety and Welfare
2.2. Provide services to those in need

Summary:

The Agreement with Gulfcoast Legal, which totals \$362,829.48, provides legal assistance to eligible residents in the County whose household income does not exceed 150% of federal poverty guidelines. Legal services provided with County dollars include consumer assistance, foreclosure defense, landlord/tenant, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), and domestic violence cases.

Under this agreement, Gulfcoast Legal will provide the Community Law Program (CLP) and Bay Area Legal Services (BALS), the sum of \$45,353.69 each (12.5% each), to better reach residents throughout the County and to provide support for pro bono clinics at the Courthouses in St. Petersburg and Clearwater. Gulfcoast Legal will retain \$272,122.10 (75%) as the lead agency and will continue to report demographic data collected from each of the agencies on a quarterly basis.

Background Information:

Legal Aid Services are a required Court-related program under Article V support. Funding for this agreement is primarily generated by a \$65.00 Court fee on criminal and traffic cases, with twenty-five percent (25%) of that fee allocated to Legal Aid Services. The Board created Section 46-32 of the Pinellas County Code to impose this additional court cost. The balance of the program funding is supported by County General Fund dollars.

Our current legal aid support has been consistent with statutorily defined local requirements that went into effect on July 1, 2004 under Article V revisions. These requirements set funding levels from the base funding year of Fiscal Year 2003 (FY03) with increases at 1.5% applied annually. The base funding level has increased annually by the required amount, reaching \$357,467.00 in FY10. It is important to note, that starting in FY11, through the efforts of the Florida Association of Counties, local funding was exempted from the mandated 1.5% increase for a period of six (6) years ending in FY16. The FY16 agreement was funded at \$357,467.47 with the County supporting approximately \$93,955.00 from the general fund based on revenue projections. The FY17 agreement reflects a 1.5% increase to the Legal Aid funding amount for a total of \$362,829.48.

FY16 reporting shows a total of 1,544 cases worked between the three agencies over six months. Gulfcoast Legal served a majority of those cases at 950 (61.5%), with CLP serving 541 (35%) and

BALS serving 53 (3.4%).

Fiscal Impact:

The amount of the Agreement is \$362,829.48, payable in twelve (12) monthly payments of \$30,235.79 each. Funds are budgeted with Human Services, Justice Coordination, for FY17.

A breakdown of the fees collected during FY13 - FY16 through court costs is as follows:

FY13 - \$254,810.29 collected by the Clerk and designated for legal aid services.

FY14 - \$261,917.21 collected by the Clerk and designated for legal aid services.

FY15 - \$257,761.72 collected by the Clerk and designated for legal aid services.

FY16 - \$263,512.00 (estimated to be collected).

The difference between amount collected and amount expended is paid from the County's General Fund.

Staff Member Responsible:

Lourdes Benedict, Director, Human Services

Partners:

Gulfcoast Legal Services, Inc.

Community Law Program

Bay Area Legal Services

Attachments:

Legal Aid Services Agreement

Gulfcoast Legal Services Doing Things Model