



# Pinellas County

## Staff Report

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**File #:** 17-1312A, **Version:** 1

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**Subject:**

Agreement with Gulfcoast Legal Services, Inc. for legal aid services.

**Recommended Action:**

Approval and execution of the Agreement with Gulfcoast Legal Services, Inc. (Gulfcoast Legal) to provide free legal aid services to eligible residents.

**Strategic Plan:**

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

**Summary:**

This agreement with Gulfcoast Legal, which totals \$368,271.96, provides legal assistance to eligible residents of the County whose household income does not exceed 150% of the federal poverty guidelines. Legal services provided with County dollars include consumer assistance, foreclosure defense, landlord/tenant, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), and domestic violence cases.

Gulfcoast Legal will retain 75% and evenly distribute 25% of funding to the Community Law Program (CLP) and Bay Area Legal Services (BALS). The subcontracted agencies enable services to reach more residents throughout the County and staff pro bono clinics at the courthouses in St. Petersburg and Clearwater. Gulfcoast Legal will provide the County with the demographic data for all of the agencies in a quarterly report.

**Background Information:**

Legal Aid Services are a required Court-related program under Article V of the Florida Constitution. Funding for this agreement is primarily generated by a \$65.00 Court fee on criminal and traffic cases, with 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 reaching \$357,467.00 in FY 10. 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 FY18 includes a 1.5% increase over FY17 amount.

FY17 reporting to date shows that a total of 2602 clients/cases were handled between the three agencies over the last nine (9) months. Gulfcoast Legal served a majority of those cases at 1055 (41%), with CLP serving 654 (25%) and BALS serving 893 (34%). In 2016, there were 61% female and 39% male clients served. The top two categories for services were 32% for housing concerns,

and 25% were family-related matters.

**Fiscal Impact:**

The amount of the Agreement is \$368,271.96, payable in twelve (12) monthly payments of \$30,689.33 each. Funds are included in the FY18 Proposed Budget within Human Services, Justice Coordination.

A breakdown of the fees collected during FY13 through FY17 through court costs are 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 - \$267,433.33 collected by the Clerk and designated for legal aid services.

FY17 - \$265,346.00 (estimated to be collected).

The difference between the amount collected and the amount expended represents a subsidy funded from the County's General Fund.

**Staff Member Responsible:**

Lourdes Benedict, Director, Human Services

**Partners:**

Gulfcoast Legal Services, Inc.

Community Law Program (CLP)

Bay Area Legal Services (BALS)

**Attachments:**

Agreement with Gulfcoast Legal Services, Inc.

Attachment A - Insurance Requirements