Pinellas County

Staff Report

File #: 19-1031A, **Version:** 1

Subject:
Agreement with Gulfcoast Legal Services, Inc. to provide legal aid to eligible Pinellas County residents.

Recommended Action:
Approval of the Agreement with Gulfcoast Legal Services, Inc. to provide free legal aid to eligible residents of the County.

- Funding of legal aid services is a required court-related program that provides assistance to those with household incomes that do not exceed 150% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines.
- Gulfcoast Legal Services functions as the lead agency and shares funding with Bay Area Legal Services and the Community Law program.
- The amount of the agreement is $379,430.00 with an estimation of $253,735.00 to be collected from court fees.

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

Summary:
This Agreement provides legal assistance for residents of the County whose household income does not exceed 150% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines. Legal service areas funded by the County include elder law, housing assistance, consumer advocacy, public benefits, family law, and domestic violence.

Gulfcoast Legal Services, Inc. (GLS) retains 75% of the monthly amount from the County, and distributes 12.5% each to Bay Area Legal Services (BALS) and Community Law Program (CLP), in order to reach more residents throughout the County.

Background Information:
Legal Aid Services funding is a required court-related program under Article V of the Florida Constitution. Funding for this agreement is primarily generated by an additional $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 be able to collect this additional court cost.

The County's legal aid support has been consistent with statutorily-defined requirements under Article V. These requirements set funding levels from the base funding year of 2003, with increases of 1.5% annually. In 2011, through the efforts of the Florida Association of Counties, local funding was exempted from the 1.5% increase for a period of six years ending in 2016. The County resumed the 1.5% increase with the FY17 through FY19 renewals. This FY20 Agreement also includes a 1.5%

increase.

For the 2018 calendar year, 2541 legal aid services were provided to citizens, where GLS handled 54%, BALS 17%, and CLP 29%. Of those seeking assistance, 65% were female and the top concerns were housing, family and consumer matters.

In FY19, GLS has initiated quarterly legal aid coordination meetings in coordination with the County to work on aligning and connecting community services and outcomes.

Fiscal Impact:
The amount of the Agreement is $379,430.00, payable in 12 monthly payments of $31,619.17 each. Article V funding associated with the support of legal services is estimated at $253,735.00. Funding to support this item has been included in the FY20 Proposed Budget.

Fees collected by the Clerk and designated for legal aid previously were as follows:

FY14	$261,917.21
FY15	$257,761.72
FY16	$267,433.33
FY17	$240,714.47
FY18	$241,708.13
FY19	$253,735.00 (estimate)

Staff Member Responsible:
Daisy Rodriguez, Director, Human Services

Partners:
Gulfcoast Legal Services, Inc.
Bay Area Legal Services
Community Law Program

Attachments:
Agreement with Gulfcoast Legal Services, Inc.
Attachment A - Insurance Requirements