



# Pinellas County

## Staff Report

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File #: 22-0801A, Version: 1

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### **Subject:**

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

### **Recommended Action:**

Approval of the funding agreement with Gulfcoast Legal Services, Inc. (Gulfcoast Legal) to provide free legal aid services to eligible residents of the County.

- Funding of legal aid services is required under FL statute as a court-related program.
- The County's legal aid support has been consistent with statutorily defined requirements under FL Statute 29.008. These requirements have established funding levels from the base funding year of 2003, with increases of 1.5% annually.
- Legal aid provides assistance to residents with household incomes that do not exceed 250% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines.
- Gulfcoast Legal serves as the lead agency for legal aid services in Pinellas County, retaining 75% of the funding and distributing 25% to Bay Area Legal Services, Inc. (12.5%) and the Community Law Program, Inc. (12.5%).
- The Agreement provides funding in an amount not to exceed \$396,780.00, with an estimation of \$171,000.00 to be collected from court fees and \$225,780.00 from General Funds.
- This continuation agreement provides for a five-year contract term.

### **Strategic Plan:**

Ensure Public Health, Safety, and Welfare

2.1 Provide planning, coordination, prevention, and protective services to ensure a safe and secure community

2.2 Be a facilitator, convener, and purchaser of services for those in need

2.4 Support programs that seek to prevent and remedy the causes of homelessness and move individuals and families from homelessness to permanent housing

Deliver First Class Services to the Public and Our Customers

5.1 Maximize partner relationships and public outreach

5.2 Be responsible stewards of the public's resources

5.3 Ensure effective and efficient delivery of county services and support

### **Summary:**

This Agreement provides funding for legal assistance to eligible residents of the County in the areas of Family Law, Elder Law, Consumer Law, Housing Law, Tax Law, and Public Benefits Advocacy.

Gulfcoast Legal retains 75% of the monthly payment amount from the County and distributes 12.5% each to BALS and 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 court fees from an additional \$65.00 fee assessed in criminal and traffic cases, with 25% of that fee designated to Legal Aid services. The additional \$65.00 fee assessment was made possible with the creation of Section 46-32 of the Pinellas County Code of Ordinances.

The County's legal aid support has been consistent with statutorily-defined requirements under FL Statute 29.008. These requirements have established funding levels from the base funding year of 2003, with increases of 1.5% annually.

For the 2021 calendar year, 1798 clients were provided with legal aid services, with Gulfcoast Legal handling 86%, BALS handling 2%, and CLP handling 12%, of those services. The majority of cases were in the areas of Housing, Family Law, Consumer Law, and Individual Rights.

In 2019, Gulfcoast Legal commenced quarterly legal aid coordination meetings with the County, BALS and CLP, to work on aligning and connecting community services and outcomes.

**Fiscal Impact:**

Funding in an amount not to exceed \$396,780.00 is budgeted based on anticipated court fees estimated at \$171,000.00 and \$225,780.00 from General funds. Appropriation to support this agreement is consistent with the FY23 Budget Request. Following years will increase at the 1.5% rate dictated by the statute.

**Staff Member Responsible:**

Karen Yatchum, Director, Human Services

**Partners:**

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

**Attachments:**

Agreement  
Attachment 1 - Insurance Requirements