



Broward County

Legislation Text

File #: 21-1056, Version: 1

Broward County Commission Regular Meeting

Director's Name: Keith D. Bostick (Deputy Director)

Department: Human Services

Division: Family Success Administration

Information

Requested Action

MOTION TO AUTHORIZE County Administrator to execute First Amendment to Agreement between Broward County and Legal Aid Service of Broward County, Inc., Agreement No. 19-FSAD-8309-1, subject to review for legal sufficiency by the Office of the County Attorney, adding Program No. 2 in the amount of \$123,750, effective from June 1, 2021 through September 30, 2021, to provide legal services to residents of Broward County at risk of homelessness due to COVID-19; authorize the County Administrator to execute amendments to the Agreement, subject to the review for legal sufficiency by the Office of the County Attorney, that do not increase the annual funding amount or significantly alter the approved scope of work; and authorize the County Administrator to take all necessary administrative and budgetary actions to implement the Agreement as amended.

Why Action is Necessary

Agreements with external agencies require approval by the Broward County Board of County Commissioners ("Commission").

What Action Accomplishes

Approval of this Amendment provides legal services to residents of Broward County at risk of homelessness due to the COVID-19 public health emergency.

Is this Action Goal Related

Yes

Previous Action Taken

None

Summary Explanation/Background

THE HUMAN SERVICES DEPARTMENT AND THE FAMILY SUCCESS ADMINISTRATION DIVISION RECOMMEND APPROVAL OF THE ABOVE MOTION.

This item supports the Commission's value of "approaching human services collaboratively and compassionately, with special emphasis on the most vulnerable," and the goal to "collaborate with public and private partners to find creative, equitable, and responsible solutions to systemic community problems, especially permanent, supportive housing for persons experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness." This item provides legal assistance to complement rent assistance programs for residents who are at a higher risk of homelessness due to COVID-19 and require legal services to achieve or maintain housing stability.

Broward County continues to provide rent assistance to many residents impacted by COVID-19 through several federal, state, and county-funded rent assistance programs. Although the recovery process has begun, many residents continue to struggle with unemployment or reduced income, and housing instability is now a greater concern as eviction moratoriums are expiring. Even though the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ("CDC") extended the federal moratorium on residential evictions for non-payment through June 30, 2021, this protection is not automatic. The tenant must provide their landlord with a CDC Eviction Protection Declaration form asserting they qualify for eviction protection. Many tenants are unaware of the legal steps they must take to avail themselves of the protections under the moratorium.

Legal Aid Service of Broward County, Inc., ("LASBC") has provided legal services since 1973 to Broward County residents otherwise unable to afford legal counsel. Services include advocacy, arbitration, forms assistance, class action litigation, legal counseling, domestic relations including dependent children, landlord-tenant disputes, and home-ownership preservation.

This Amendment adds COVID-19 related legal services for residents at a higher risk of homelessness where rent assistance alone will not guarantee continued residence. The services LASBC will provide include advice regarding eviction resolution, negotiation with the landlord for eviction dismissal, and representation in court. The services will also include assistance with application to Broward County's Emergency Rental Assistance Program ("ERAP") portal, education about ERAP for tenants and landlords, and negotiating ERAP payment acceptance with landlords. Additionally, LASBC will accept referrals to assist tenants participating in the Emergency Rental Assistance Mediation program for COVID-19 related residential eviction cases who have failed to reach a mediation settlement and are still facing eviction.

Funding through this Amendment will provide approximately 4,100 hours of legal and paralegal services to residents at risk of homelessness in Broward County.

The Agreement will be reviewed for legal sufficiency by the Office of the County Attorney prior to approval and execution by the County Administrator.

Source of Additional Information

Ismael A. Martinez, Director, Family Success Administration Division, (954) 357-6367

Natalie M. Beasley, Assistant Director, Family Success Administration Division, (954) 357-6367

Fiscal Impact

Fiscal Impact/Cost Summary

Funding for this Agreement is included in the fiscal year 2021 budget; \$123,750 is from the County's General Fund (10010).