

CAROL-LISA PHILLIPS
CHIEF JUDGE
SEVENTEENTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT OF
FLORIDA



BROWARD COUNTY COURTHOUSE
201 S.E. 6TH STREET, #20170
FORT LAUDERDALE, FL 33301
954-831-7554

April 17, 2026

Monica Cepero, County Administrator
115 South Andrews Avenue, Room 409
Fort Lauderdale, FL 33301
mcepero@broward.org

Re: Article V, Revision 7 – Certification of Local Requirements for FY 2026-2027

Dear Ms. Cepero,

The timely administration of justice through efficient case resolution along with addressing the needs of the local community and those appearing before the court are central to the mission of the Seventeenth Judicial Circuit of Florida. The Court is most appreciative of the County's support for various programs and initiatives, and our continued collaboration with the County will only help to further the Court's mission.

To ensure continued service to the local community and in compliance with section 29.008(2), Florida Statutes, I respectfully certify and submit the FY2026-2027 Local Requirements for the Seventeenth Judicial Circuit, and other justice system stakeholders. Pursuant to section 29.008(2), the County's obligation is to fund "...reasonable and necessary salaries, costs, and expenses of the state courts system, including associated staff and expenses" to meet the Court's Local Requirements. The statute defines "local requirements" as "...those specialized programs, nonjudicial staff, and other expenses associated with specialized court programs, specialized prosecution needs, specialized defense needs, or resources required of a local jurisdiction as a result of special factors or circumstances."

As set forth in the above Florida Statute, these factors include geographic and demographic factors, labor market forces, the number, and location of court facilities as well as the volume, severity, complexity, or mix of court cases. The following programs and services represent the Local Requirements for FY2026-2027:

Seventeenth Judicial Circuit Court

1. Mental Health Court
2. Broward Community Justice Alternatives
3. Alternative Sanctions Coordinator
4. Family Court Services

State Attorney's Office

1. Domestic Violence Victim Advocate Program

The Court's existing Local Requirements are currently funded, in part, by the collection of a \$65 court cost, "imposed by the court when a person pleads guilty or nolo contendere to, or is found guilty of, or adjudicated delinquency for, any felony, misdemeanor, delinquent act, or criminal traffic offense" Because court cost revenues have declined over time, the County has continued to fund these integral programs using transfers from the General Fund. I mention this merely to highlight that court cost revenues are available to supplement, and are not the sole source of, funding for the Court's Local Requirements. *See* § 939.185(1)(a)1., Fla. Stat. Accordingly, to the extent court cost revenue is insufficient to fund these programs, we respectfully request funding from the County's General Fund for these Local Requirements.

Please find enclosed descriptions of Circuit Court programs and services being certified. Should you require any further information, please feel free to contact me at 954-831-7554 or Joseph D'Amico, Trial Court Administrator at 954-831-7741. We are providing this information based upon the deadline requested by the Office and Budget Management. Pursuant to section 29.008, Florida Statutes, however, we respectfully reserve the opportunity to supplement these Local Requirements, if needed, up until June 1, 2025.

Thank you again for your continued dedication and commitment to furthering the mission of the courts by providing Broward's residents with equal, fair, and impartial access to justice.

Sincerely,

/s/ Carol-Lisa Phillips

Carol-Lisa Phillips
Chief Judge

Cc: Kevin Kelleher, Deputy County Administrator
Jennifer Steelman, Broward County, Director, OMB
Elijah Anderson, Broward County, Asst. Director, OMB
Jenna Lyons, Broward County, Budget Analyst
Joseph D'Amico, Trial Court Administrator



**SEVENTEENTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT COURT
CERTIFICATION OF LOCAL REQUIREMENTS
FY 2026-2027**

**Carol-Lisa Phillips, Chief Judge
Joseph M. D'Amico, Trial Court Administrator**

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LOCAL REQUIREMENTS BUDGET SUMMARY

Trial Court

Program	Anticipated FY2026-2027 Cost
Mental Health Court	\$478,130
Justice Alternatives Program	\$84,670
Family Court Services	\$481,971.23
Alternative Sanctions Coordinator	\$98,790

State Attorney's Office

Program	Anticipated FY2026-2027 Cost
Domestic Violence Victim Advocate Program	\$230,700

OVERVIEW OF SEVENTEENTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT

The Seventeenth Judicial Circuit Court of Florida is a part of the State Courts Systems and a co-equal branch of government serving the residents of Broward County. It is one of twenty judicial circuits in the State and, although not geographically large in comparison with other circuit courts, it is the second largest circuit court in the State, with 90 judges¹ 12 quasi-judicial officers,² and several hundred court staff.

Circuit Court

The Circuit Court is a Court of General Jurisdiction. It has exclusive jurisdiction in all actions at law in which the matter in controversy exceeds fifty thousand dollars (\$50,000) in proceedings relating to civil disputes, as well as criminal felony, juvenile delinquency, family, dependency, domestic violence, and probate. Circuit Court also hears appeals from County Court civil traffic infraction proceedings and administrative orders of local government code enforcement boards.

Circuit Criminal

The Circuit Court Criminal Division is responsible for all felony matters, which include murder, sexual offenses, robbery, burglary, theft, forgery, and fraud.

Circuit Civil

The Circuit Court Civil Division is responsible for all civil matters exceeding fifty thousand dollars (\$50,000), including automobile and other negligence, professional malpractice, product liability, condominium lawsuits, eminent domain, real property, mortgage foreclosure, contract, and indebtedness.

Unified Family Court

The Unified Family Court is responsible for all domestic relations matters, including dissolution of marriage, child custody and support, name changes, adoptions, paternity suits, and modification proceedings. It also includes domestic violence, dependency (relating to juveniles who are abandoned, abused or neglected) and juvenile delinquency (juvenile criminal) matters.

Probate

The Circuit Court Probate Division is responsible for all matters relating to the validity and execution of wills, appointment of guardians, trusts, Baker and Marchman Act matters, and incapacity and guardianship proceedings.

County Court

¹ Presently, there are fifty-eight (58) Circuit Court Judges and thirty-two (32) County Court Judges.

² Nine (9) General Magistrates and three (3) Child Support Enforcement Hearing Officers.

The County Court is a court of limited jurisdiction, which hears actions at law in which the matter in controversy does not exceed fifty thousand dollars (\$50,000). County Courts have exclusive jurisdiction over traffic, small claims, most landlord and tenant disputes, and misdemeanor criminal cases. County Judges are assigned to each of the court's satellite courthouses in Hollywood, Deerfield Beach, and Plantation in addition to presiding at the Main Courthouse Complex in Fort Lauderdale.

Court Administration

The Office of the Trial Court Administrator provides services and administrative oversight over the court's various programs. The office serves as staff to the judges and presently employs a total of 211 personnel.³

Court services include:

- Purchasing office supplies, equipment, and furnishings for the Judiciary, Court Administration, court programs, and the courtrooms.
- Personnel services to the County and State funded court employees. Additional responsibilities include recruitment and selection, classification, compensation and benefits, and employee relations.
- Research and statistical analysis required by the Chief Judge, State Courts Administrator, and others, as well as for internal management that encompasses monitoring and periodic evaluations.
- Financial management, including preparation and management of both the State and County budgets.
- Development and administration of circuit emergency preparedness plans and continuity of operations plans for emergency court closures.
- ADA coordination and accommodation.
- Community outreach through educational tours for students and other visiting groups.
- Coordination of facilities maintenance, *i.e.*, courtrooms, office space.
- Providing assistance to attorneys and members of the public.

³ 171 state-funded and 40 county-funded. This figure does not include the 90 judges or the 90 judicial assistants who serve as personal staff to each judge.

LOCAL REQUIREMENTS - § 29.008, FLA. STAT.

In 1998, Florida voters passed a constitutional amendment to Article V of Florida's Constitution. The amendment, implemented in 2004 and commonly referred to as Revision 7, transformed the manner in which the state courts receive funding. Specifically, it transferred primary funding responsibility for Florida's courts from local governments to the state. Notwithstanding, counties remain obligated to fund certain aspects of the state courts, including local requirements.

Pursuant to section 29.008(2), Florida Statutes, one of the County's obligation is to fund ". . . reasonable and necessary salaries, costs, and expenses of the state court system, including associated staff and expenses" of the Court's Local Requirements. The statute defines local requirements as ". . . those specialized programs, nonjudicial staff, and other expenses associated with specialized court programs, specialized prosecution needs, specialized defense needs, or resources required of a local jurisdiction as a result of special factors or circumstances." Such circumstances include geographic and demographic factors, labor market forces, the number and location of court facilities, or the volume, severity, complexity, or mix of court cases.

The following programs consist of the Court's Local Requirements for FY 2026-2027.

TRIAL COURT LOCAL REQUIREMENTS

Mental Health Court

Section 394.47892(1), Florida Statutes, provides that “[e]ach county may fund a mental health court program under which a defendant in the justice system assessed with a mental illness shall be processed in such a manner as to appropriately address the severity of the identified mental illness through treatment services tailored to the individual needs of the participant.” As you may know, the Seventeenth Judicial Circuit was the **first** court in the nation to create a Mental Health Court for **both** felony and misdemeanor offenses and these programs have continued in large part to the continued financial support from the County.

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, it is estimated that more than 1 in 5 of U.S. adults live with a mental illness.⁴ That means, for a population of two million, approximately 400,000 Broward County residents are living with a mental illness. From January 2021 through June 2025, there were 38,705 defendants facing one or more felony criminal charges and 47,222 defendants facing one or more misdemeanor or county or municipal ordinance charges. Based on the above statistic, that equates to approximately 17,000 individuals charged with one or more criminal offenses who are suffering from a mental illness. It is imperative that the Court have the tools and resources to not only dispose of pending cases efficiently but to also address any underlying mental illness that may likely be the reason (or part thereof) for the person’s involvement with the criminal justice system.

Presently, we have four county-funded staff⁵ who provide case management support to the judges presiding over our felony and misdemeanor mental health courts, while also providing support when mental health issues arise in juvenile delinquency proceedings. Continued funding of these positions and related operating expenses is essential to ensure these cases progress efficiently from filing to disposition while also ensuring that those who qualify to participate in mental health court are linked to appropriate services to address underlying mental illness. The positions and related operating expenses total \$396,130. This figure represents an increase of \$4,360 from OMB’s proposed core budget for this program. This additional funding increase is to allow the court to send up to three staff members to the 2027 AllRise Annual Conference in National Harbor, MD. AllRise offers the only national educational conference for treatment court professionals.

⁴ National Institute of Mental Health, <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/mental-illness> (last accessed April 15, 2026).

⁵ One Mental Health Unit Manager (position 14769) and three Mental Health Program Specialists (positions 15002, 15003, and 18968).

For FY 2026-2027 we are also requesting \$75,000 to allow the Court to engage a peer specialist to support the Court's **misdemeanor** mental health court program. Peers and mentors are individuals who have lived experience and skills learned in training to assist others achieve and maintain recovery and wellness from substance abuse and/or mental health disorders, and they provide an invaluable service. If authorized, the Circuit has an immediate plan to implement the use of this funding. For several years, the Circuit has used state funding to contract with South Florida Wellness Network (SFWN) for peer support specialist services for the court's other problem-solving courts. SFWN is willing and able to supply additional peers to support the participants in our misdemeanor mental health court program, and given the Court's existing relationship with SFWN, the implementation of this added service would be swift. Although the Court has engaged a peer support specialist for our felony mental health court through state funding, pending caseloads in both the felony and misdemeanor mental health programs dictate that an additional peer is needed. Moreover, because of funding guidelines, we are not authorized to utilize the state funding for the misdemeanor program.

Lastly, the Court is once again requesting \$7,000 to purchase County bus passes to distribute as needed to program participants who lack reliable transportation to attend required court hearings. The provision of bus passes to those who lack reliable transportation will reduce delays in case processing time and ensure court participants are able to attend required court hearings. This will increase attendance at court hearings, which will reduce the number of capiases issued by judges for nonappearance, thus avoiding the unnecessary crowding of our county's jails.

Justice Alternatives Program

Initially called Citizens' Dispute when it was established in 1976, the Broward Community Justice Alternatives program (BCJA) continued following the implementation of Revision 7. For many years, the BCJA offered mediation services to resolve community or neighborhood cases as well as worthless check and tax diversion cases referred by the State Attorney's Office. The program offered a quick collection and recovery of thousands of dollars annually for local businesses. Because of budget reductions, actual mediation services are no longer provided as part of the BCJA. Rather, and presently, one (1) county-funded full-time employee provides administrative support to the Court's Mediation and Arbitration Unit. The staff member funded through this program serves as the primary receptionist for the entire mediation department, answering phone calls and greeting walk-ins. In recent years, this person has taken on additional responsibilities to ensure the efficient processing of mediations, while decreasing overall program costs. For example, she assists with scheduling contract mediators and confirming that all parties have the requisite information prior to the mediation. This allows the program to timely cancel contract mediators, thus saving money by decreasing the number of no shows for mediation. The table below shows the number of cases referred to the Court's mediation department for the past three years, along with a projection for the current year, which fully justifies the continued need for this support position.

Year (January to December)	Number of Mediation Referrals (family and dependency cases)
2023	2,045
2024	2,271
2025	2,402
2026 (projected)	2,328

Family Court Services (Pilot Program authorized in FY25-26)

We are presently seeking the continuation of funding to support the four full-time staff authorized for the current fiscal year along with funding for two additional staff members and operating expenses to aid the burgeoning Family Court Services (FCS) Pilot Program. Due to the number of court orders referring families to FCS, assistance is desperately needed to perform the duties of a Judicial Navigator and a Judicial Support Investigator. Since January 2026, 126 families have been referred to Family Court Services for a 396 different court-ordered services.

The Court's FY26-27 funding request for this local requirement is broken down as follows:

- **Continued Funding** for 4 FTE and Operating Expenses (total \$320,318.85)
 - 1 FTE Family Court Services Manager
 - Pay Grade: 116
 - Salary: \$65,401.26
 - Total Compensation: \$97,317.25
 - 1 FTE Judicial Support Investigator
 - Pay Grade: 112
 - Salary: \$48,972.05
 - Total Compensation: \$77,326.19
 - 1 FTE Judicial Navigator
 - Pay Grade: 112
 - Salary: \$48,972.05
 - Total Compensation: \$77,326.19
 - 1 FTE Administrative Assistant
 - Pay Grade: 106
 - Salary: \$31,732.59
 - Total Compensation: \$56,349.22
 - Operating Expenses - \$12,000
- **New Funding** for FY 26-27 (total \$154,652.38)
 - 1 FTE Judicial Support Investigator
 - Pay Grade: 112
 - Salary: \$48,972.05
 - Total Compensation: \$77,326.19

- 1 FTE Judicial Navigator
 - Pay Grade: 112
 - Salary: \$48,972.05
 - Total Compensation: \$77,326.19
- Computer Equipment (only need if two additional staff are authorized): \$7,000
- **Total Funding** for FY 26-27 → \$481,971.23

****Note:** The above total funding figure does not include the 2% salary increase that is included in OMB's core budget for the court's other programs. We would respectfully request the same salary increase for all of these requested positions. Additionally, should state employees receive an across the board salary increase in excess of 2%, we request funding to match that increase for all of these positions.

Justification

The Family Court Services Manager is aiding the currently employed Judicial Navigator full-time, and still there are not enough hours to accomplish all of the necessary work. This has resulted in the manager's other administrative responsibilities for the unit to suffer because she is having to perform the duties of an additional Navigator. The Judicial Navigator and Family Court Services Manager have been responsible for identifying and vetting community programs and service providers to satisfy court orders, as well as connecting the families to the appropriate services based on judicial instructions. They ensure compliance with court orders, monitor referrals to providers and provide compassionate case management to the families. They make certain that families access timely and effective services, monitor ongoing compliance and maintain communication with both service providers and litigants, while also providing accurate documentation for the court.

Staff have been working beyond their standard hours to link families with services, but still there has not been enough time to identify and vet the necessary programs for optimal service. As can be seen by the numbers, many families require multiple services, which imposes a monumental obligation on the limited staff currently assigned to this program. Linkage and reporting for a single service can equate to a couple of hours or sometimes a full day, depending on the complexity. Additionally, when the Court first contemplated the FCS program, it included an outreach component. Time constraints, resulting from current resource limitations including staffing shortages, have thwarted this. For example, the Court envisioned the FCS team facilitating presentations and training to enlist the help of attorneys and others involved in pending

litigation. This would move the referral process for servicing forward before a judge identifies a need, furthering progress for families more quickly. The numbers from our judiciary have been impressive, but many more families in need could be helped through this outreach and training if sufficient resources were appropriated.

The plight of the currently employed Judicial Support Investigator is similar; there are not enough hours to timely complete all court-ordered social investigations due to limited staff. Pursuant to section 61.20, Florida Statutes, the Judicial Support Investigator is responsible for providing the court with evaluative information in proceedings involving custody and visitation disputes. The Judicial Support Investigator provides in-depth reports to help facilitate the court's determination as to custody and visitation arrangements in the best interests of the children. This is accomplished through clinical interviews and site visits. The Judicial Support Investigator prepares timely reports that provide accurate details and appropriate options for judges.

Based on Court Administration's experience of providing social investigations, it is unreasonable to expect that one Judicial Support Investigator can provide more than 2-3 investigations in a single month. Since January 2026, 22 social investigations have been ordered, of which 9 have been completed. At least one more Judicial Support Investigator is necessary to clear the backlog and keep up with the demand for this essential service.

Further Support for Continuation of Local Requirement / FCS Program

Prior to the implementation of Revision 7, the Court had a county-funded Family Court Services unit that was comprised of various departments, including court psychology and custody evaluation services. These previously funded programs and services, and many more, are essential components to a model family court, see *In re: Report of the Family Court Steering Committee*, 794 So. 2d 518 (Fla. 2001), and all unfortunately were eliminated based on the transfer of funding responsibility from local governments to the state. Through County funding in FY25-26, the court was able to revive this unit and some programs, and we look forward to continuing the program in FY26-27 and future years.

There is a common belief that family is the "bedrock of society" essential to the proper functioning and maintenance of local communities. Divorce is a major life stressor, one that creates turmoil within a family unit and ancillary negative consequences affecting the mental and physical health of all involved. Children are especially prone to suffering during the pendency of divorce proceedings and following final judgment of divorce. This suffering continues post-judgment as many cases are reopened with a litany of issues continuing to be litigated. "Children experience many difficulties which may linger into adulthood if left

unaddressed, adversely affecting their success in intimate relationships.”⁶ However, “many divorced parents are unaware of the importance of interventions for their children” as they navigate the family court system.⁷ The intent of this proposal is to ensure sufficient staffing to allow the court to offer a variety of in house services and serve as a navigational resource to link families to court-ordered services all while monitoring compliance and remaining accountable to the court.

Our request follows several of the twelve guiding principles from the Family Court Steering Committee, which were approved by the Florida Supreme Court in *In re: Report of the Family Court Steering Committee*, 794 So. 2d 518 (Fla. 2001). Of particular relevance are the following principles:

- Therapeutic justice should be a key part of the family court process. Therapeutic justice is a process that attempts to address the family’s interrelated legal and nonlegal problems to produce a result that improves the family’s functioning. The process should empower families through skills development, assist them to resolve their own disputes, provide access to appropriate services, and offer a variety of dispute resolution forums where the family can resolve problems without additional emotional trauma.
- Trial courts must coordinate and maximize court resources and establish linkages with community resources.
- Court services should be available to litigants at a reasonable cost and accessible without economic discrimination.

Additionally, the Florida Supreme Court noted, *inter alia*, that the following elements, all of which will be satisfied through the fulfillment of the instant budgetary request, are essential to a model family court:

- Custody evaluation – Providing the court with evaluative information in proceedings involving custody disputes.
- Supervised Visitation – Promoting the utilization of qualified programs for supervised visitation and/or monitored exchange.
- Education Programs for Parents – Utilizing education programs for parents involved in family law proceedings.

⁶ Donahey, Katherine, *Effects of Divorce on Children: The Importance of Intervention*, Intuition: The BYU Undergraduate Journal of Psychology, Vol. 13, Iss. 1, Article 3 (2018).

⁷ *Id.*

- Counseling Services/Treatment Programs – Assuring the availability of crisis intervention and long-term counseling/treatment programs and ensuring that compliance is monitored when such services are court ordered.

A review of several of the factors listed in section 29.008, Florida Statutes to determine local requirements also supports the court’s request.

Geographic factors

Although our Circuit is not large geographically when compared to other circuits, we are the second largest Circuit in the state (second only to Miami-Dade) based on population, the number of judges, court staff, and court filings.

Broward County is home to approximately 2 million residents, and those who avail themselves of the family court system should be able to receive the needed services and resources contemplated herein.

Demographic factors

As mentioned, Broward County is home to nearly 2 million residents. The median household income is \$80,734 and the median family income is less than \$92,109.⁸ It is our intent that this program and the resources court staff link participants with will provide individuals (parents and children alike) with the tools and resources to remain contributing and emotionally stable members of our community following the disposition of their family cases.

The number and location of court facilities

There is one main courthouse complex located in downtown Fort Lauderdale, and three satellite courthouse locations, each located in Deerfield Beach, Plantation, and Hollywood. Court Administration has office space at all locations to accommodate the anticipated program

The volume, severity, complexity, or mix of court cases

There are currently nine judges assigned to the family law domestic relations division and three additional judges assigned to handle domestic violence cases. There are also five general magistrates and three designated child support enforcement hearing officers who hold a quasi-judicial role to help hear contested family law matters, post judgment matters and Title IV-D child support matters.

The volume of family law cases and their increasing complexity also justifies this request. For calendar year 2025, there were a total of 20,995 **new** family cases

⁸ <https://www.broward.org/Planning/Demographics/Pages/QuickFacts.aspx> (last accessed April 15, 2026).

filed and 8,188 previously filed family cases *reopened*. It is important to note that these cases are not as simple as entering an order dissolving a marriage. Matters relating to equitable distribution of assets and liabilities (both marital and non-marital), alimony (spousal support), child support, timesharing and parental responsibility, and the establishment of parenting plans is a routine occurrence in most cases. These cases also sometimes intersect with a companion domestic violence case.

The pending⁹ caseloads for each judge assigned to a family division as of the end of February 2026 is as follows:

Court Division	Pending Case Count
33	751
35	633
36	803
37	698
38	598
40	748
41	695
42	500
44	521
Total Pending Cases	5,947

Based upon the above, we are requesting continued funding for the four full-time court staff authorized for the current fiscal year along with operating expenses. Additionally, we are requesting two additional full-time staff as noted herein given the success of the program. The statutory local requirement factors weigh in favor of both continued and new funding. Besides providing necessary services to individuals and families during their family law case, the requested positions will increase judicial efficiency by allowing judges to rely on staff to monitor compliance with court ordered, which in turn will allow the judge to focus on the needs of more complex cases.

⁹ Pending caseload should not be construed to be the same as newly filed or reopened cases.

Alternative Sanctions Coordinator

Alternative Sanctions Coordinator (ASC) positions are considered Local Requirements pursuant to express statutory directive. See § 29.008(3)(b), Fla. Stat.; § 984.09, Fla. Stat.; and § 985.037, Fla. Stat. The Circuit has had a full-time alternative sanctions coordinator since 1995. This individual acts as a “liaison between the judiciary, local department officials, district school board employees, and local law enforcement agencies” by coordinating and maintaining “a spectrum of contempt sanction alternatives.” § 984.09(3), Fla. Stat.; § 985.037(3), Fla. Stat. The goal of the ASC is to divert and deter juveniles from entry into the criminal justice system, as well as to help prevent repeat offenses and continued court appearances. This goal is accomplished by providing treatment alternatives for juveniles and their families, by coordinating and providing to the families of these children referrals to appropriate alcohol, drug, mental health, educational and vocational counseling, and support services.

The ASC assists the juvenile courts provide children and families with intervention, rehabilitation, and justice in a timely, humane, and effective manner.

Continued funding for this Local Requirement is integral to the workings of the juvenile delinquency divisions.

STATE ATTORNEY'S OFFICE LOCAL REQUIREMENTS

Domestic Violence Victim Advocate Program (existing program)

This Local Requirement has been in existence for over two decades and the County currently funds three (3) staff members employed by the State Attorney's Office who serve as victim advocates in domestic violence cases. Attached please find a letter from Executive Director Neva Rainford-Smith, Esq., requesting the County's continued funding for this program. The Court continues to certify this program and related employment positions as a Local Requirement.



HAROLD F. PRYOR
STATE ATTORNEY
SEVENTEENTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT OF FLORIDA
BROWARD COUNTY COURTHOUSE
201 S.E. SIXTH STREET
FORT LAUDERDALE, FL 33301-3360

PHONE (954) 831-6955

April 8, 2026

RE: Broward County Domestic Violence Advocates

Dear Joseph M. D'Amico, Esq.,

I am writing this letter to express the full support of the State Attorney's Office for the continued need of the three Broward County Judicial-funded Domestic Violence Advocates. The three Domestic Violence Advocates that are currently supervised by The State Attorney's Office are responsible for informing victims of victim rights, providing case information, supportive counseling, and referral services to victims of domestic violence. The Domestic Violence Advocates are present daily in Misdemeanor and Felony Domestic Violence Court. They provide crisis counseling and court accompaniment to all victims that attend court in person. A copy of the Job Description is attached to further demonstrate the duties and responsibilities of the Domestic Violence Victim Advocates (see attachment).

The State Attorney's Office firmly believes that the Judicial County Funding significantly contributes to the crucial work of providing legal support to victims of domestic violence and stalking within our community. In 2024, services were provided to 4,102 domestic violence victims in Broward County, based on arrest. By 2025, that number increased to 6,917, that's a 68.63% increase. In 2025, The County funded Domestic Violence Advocates provided 28,838 of victim services to Victims. The services provided include but are not limited to the following; court accompaniment, information regarding Crime Victim Compensation, safety planning, Restraining Orders, accompaniment to depositions, and language interpretation assistance.

Over the past two months, Broward County has seen several domestic violence related deaths. Among those deaths were Coral Springs Vice Mayor Nancy Metayer Bowen, a tragedy that has shaken our community. These domestic violence related deaths have put law enforcement and victims on high alert. As you are aware, Article 1, § 16 of the Florida Constitution and Chapter 960 of the Florida Statutes provides victims with certain constitutional and statutory rights and also imposes certain obligations upon the State. Many of those obligations fall upon our victim advocates to inform victims of material stages in the proceedings such as magistrates, arraignments and other court hearings and seek victim input. The domestic violence victim advocates meet victims in court on a daily basis, accompany them to depositions, hearings and trials and provide referrals. Our victim advocates have been stretched thin with meeting the needs of all of our Broward County victims. Without their services, more victims could slip through the cracks. Losing even one victim is not an option.

The State Attorney's Office has been a valuable partner in The Court Administration's efforts to address and combat Domestic Violence, dating violence, and stalking. Court Administration's dedication to promoting justice, supporting survivors, and working collaboratively with law enforcement aligns seamlessly with our mission at the State Attorney's Office. The continuation of the County Judicial funding will further empower the State Attorney's Office to expand its reach and enhance the provision of victim services to those who need it most.

The expertise and commitment demonstrated by the Domestic Violence Advocates in providing legal assistance to survivors of violence have been commendable. The continued funding of the three Domestic Violence Advocates undoubtedly will allow victims to be assisted to navigate legal complexities that victims often face and ensure that victims receive the necessary legal guidance and resources to rebuild their lives upon their victimization. The Domestic Violence Advocates are continuously receiving trauma informed training to ensure that best practices are being implemented to serve Domestic Violence victims in the community.



HAROLD F. PRYOR
STATE ATTORNEY
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PHONE (954) 831-6955

In conclusion, we strongly encourage Broward County Court Administration to continue to maintain funding for the three Domestic Violence Advocates of the State Attorney's Office Victim Advocate Unit. Court Administration's commitment to justice, combined with the support from the funding, will undoubtedly make a positive and lasting impact on the lives of victims and survivors within our community.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. If you require any additional information, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

Neva Rainford-Smith, Esq
Executive Director and Deputy Chief Assistant State Attorney
Office of the State Attorney, 17th Judicial Circuit
Phone: (954) 831-8543 | Fax: (954) 831-6171 | E-Mail: NSmith@Browardsao.com