

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

September 22, 2025

VIA EMAIL

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

Re: Second Amended Budget Request - Family Court Services

Dear Ms. Cepero,

We appreciate the opportunity to continue the discussion regarding the Court's FY 2025-2026 budget proposal for Family Court Services, and thank Broward County and the Board of County Commissioners for their continued support of the judiciary and related programs. Following last week's public hearing, we met internally to further reduce our request.

For completeness, we have included our initial and modified requests alongside the Court's current second amended proposal.

Initial Request FY25-26	Amended Request FY25-26¹	Second Amended Request FY25-26
\$1,302,970	\$760,322	\$330,319

As set forth in the Court's May 5, 2025 Certification of Local Requirements for FY 2025-2026, the Family Court Services program will allow the Court to provide a myriad of in house services for education, therapeutic intervention and other intervention services to assist families during their domestic relations cases, while also providing litigants with navigation and referral services to available service providers in the community.

The Court's second amended request will allow the Court to establish a "pilot" program to implement the most needed resources to satisfy this local requirement by hiring the following four (4) full time staff and purchasing related computer equipment for each:

Position Title	Total Compensation (salary and benefits per position)	Number of positions requests	Total Cost
-----------------------	--	---	-------------------

¹ Because of this modified request, we anticipated a request of \$542,648 for FY26-27 to fulfill the entire program.

Family Court Services Manager	\$97,317.25	1	\$97,317.25
Judicial Support Investigator	\$77,326.19	1	\$77,326.19
Judicial Navigator	\$77,326.19	1	\$77,326.19
Administrative Assistant	\$56,349.22	1	\$56,349.22
			\$308,318.85

Please refer to the Court's May 5, 2025 Certification of Local Requirements for FY 2025-2026 for position description and anticipated duties for each position.

The above figure does include anticipated costs to purchase computer equipment for each full-time employee. This anticipated cost is \$12,000 (\$3,000 per employee). We would also request an additional \$10,000 in operating expenses, for a total program cost of \$330,318.85.

It is important to note that given the much-reduced nature of this request, not all of the family division judges will be able to participate. We will have to decide internally which judges will be able to participate in the pilot program as we believe that trying to stretch the reduced staff to all of the Domestic Relations judges would reduce the positive effect we are expecting from this program. Following the successful implementation of the program, the Court intends to pursue further expansion of the program by demonstrating the program's value to Broward's citizens and families.

As discussed during our presentations, and as set forth more fully in our initial submission, the statutory factors set forth in section 29.008(2), Florida Statutes, weigh in favor of this local requirement.

Finally, pursuant to a request received on Friday, September 19, 2025, we have included as an attachment a further description of the program along with the anticipated scope of services and deliverables.

We look forward to County's attention to this matter at the October 7, 2025 Commission meeting. Should you require any further information before then, please feel free to contact me at 954-831-7554 or Joseph D'Amico, Trial Court Administrator at 954-831-7741.

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

Attachment

cc: Kevin Kelleher, Broward County, Deputy County Administrator
Michael Ruiz, Broward County, Assistant County Administrator
Sandy-Michael McDonald, Broward County, Assistant County Administrator
Tara Williams, Broward County, Director, Human Services
Danielle French, Esq., Broward County, Deputy County Attorney
Karen Gordon, Esq., Broward County, Senior Assistant County Attorney
Norman Foster, Broward County, Director, OMB
Jennifer Steelman, Broward County, Asst. Director, OMB
Elijah Anderson, Broward County, Budget Analyst
Joseph D'Amico, 17th Judicial Circuit Court, Trial Court Administrator
Taiwo Akinkunmi, 17th Judicial Circuit Court, Chief of Personnel



Family Court Services Pilot Program **Scope of Services and Deliverables**

In accordance with the Florida Supreme Court's directive that therapeutic justice be a key part of the family court process, Family Court Services will help families in addressing interrelated legal and nonlegal problems to produce a result that improves the functioning of the family unit. By reducing conflict and addressing child-related issues through investigative services to aid the court in making critical decisions in the best interests of the families, and connecting families with solution-focused and brief therapeutic interventions, Family Court Services will assist in the resolution of problems while limiting emotional trauma. The program's goal is to support the entire family unit, with particular sensitivity to the needs of children, while ensuring compliance with court orders and connecting families to appropriate resources.

Family Court Services will achieve the aforementioned by promptly hiring¹ a Family Court Services Manager, one Judicial Navigator, one Judicial Support Investigator, and one Administrative Assistant. Given the reduction in requested resources because of budgetary limitations, this workforce will only cover two of the eight Domestic Relations divisions. Upon approval of the pilot program, Court Administration will work with the judiciary to create necessary procedures, forms and a temporary database to ensure that the newly hired staff can immediately begin performing their duties and documenting their results.

In addition to managing the department, the Family Court Services Manager will be a working manager. The successful hire will be responsible for identifying and vetting community programs to provide services for the families. This will ensure that providers offer the necessary services, will work with financial challenges and that reports to the court are submitted in a timely fashion. We anticipate approximately three months to establish core services² and providers, and the establishment and maintenance of core services will be ongoing until such time as there is additional funding to support more Judicial Navigators. In addition to coordinating office workflow and supporting the staff assigned to the Family Court Services department, the Family Court Services Manager will be responsible for acting in the capacity as a Judicial Navigator when critical needs arise in Domestic Relations divisions not participating in the pilot program. We anticipate that the Family Court Services Manager will directly link at least one to two families to

¹ We anticipate one to three months to fill all requested positions.

² Core services may include services for alienation/reunification intervention, crisis intervention, co-parenting assistance, marital reconciliation, anger management, bridging families and communities, family counseling, individual counseling, substance abuse evaluation and substance abuse counseling, and other therapeutic interventions.

necessary services each day, for a total of approximately 40 referrals each month, and provide the necessary follow up and outcomes to the judiciary.

At the outset, the Judicial Navigator will be responsible for assisting the Family Court Services Manager with vetting community programs. The Judicial Navigator's primary goal will be managing complex casework, with a focus on referring families to appropriate service providers based on court orders. Additionally, the Judicial Navigator will be accountable to the Court, ensuring compliance with court orders, monitoring referrals and providing compassionate case management. They will ensure 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 judge to make informed decisions. We anticipate the Judicial Navigator will directly link at least two to three families to necessary services each day, for an anticipated monthly total of 50 families, and provide the necessary follow up and outcomes to the judiciary.

The Judicial Support Investigator will immediately be responsible for providing the court with evaluative information in proceedings involving custody and visitation disputes. More specifically, through clinical interviews and site visits, the Judicial Support Investigator will be responsible for providing in-depth home study investigations to help facilitate the court's determination as to the best interests of the children. The Judicial Support Investigator will prepare timely reports that provide accurate details and appropriate options for judges. We anticipate that the Judicial Support Investigator will provide complete and provide the court with two to three family investigations each month. Of course, this estimation depends on the complexity and circumstances of each case, factors we cannot anticipate.

After approximately two weeks of training, the Administrative Assistant will be responsible for administrative and clerical support to the Family Court Services unit. Essential functions will include answering phone calls, scheduling intake appointments, responding to general inquiries, as well as front-desk operations, such as greeting and directing visitors. They will assist with document intake, data entry, scanning, and filing tasks to support the daily operations of Family Court Services. The Administrative Assistant will provide supportive functions in at least one hundred family cases per month.