



Legislation Text

File #: 20-1159, **Version:** 1

Recommendation to authorize City Manager, or designee, to execute all documents necessary to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), with the County of Los Angeles Department of Consumer and Business Affairs, to provide Right-to-Counsel services for people facing eviction, in an amount of \$250,000, for a period of one year, commencing upon the execution date, with the option to renew annually for up to three years, at the discretion of the City Manager. (Citywide)

During the budget adoption process, the City Council added \$250,000 to the Fiscal Year 2021 (FY 21) Budget for tenant Right-to-Counsel and directed staff to return with an appropriate program to oversee the expenditure. The funds are intended to assist tenants facing eviction due to direct and indirect impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and its associated economic impact. With high unemployment rates, complex eviction moratorium regulations at the local, county, state and federal level, as well as a housing supply and affordability crisis that predates COVID-19, the effort will seek to keep Long Beach residents housed and encourage the collaboration and compromise among all parties in any tenancy dispute.

Staff evaluated three options for utilizing the funds budgeted by the City Council: (1) construct a new program administered by City staff who would procure contract legal services; (2) contract with to existing City service providers for new legal services; or (3) partner with another governmental agency to provide necessary legal services. Contracting with the County of Los Angeles (County) was determined to be the best available option due to the County's ability to immediately provide these services through its existing program compared to the start-up time and costs for the City to create its own program.

The County's program is operating today and is administered by the Los Angeles County Department of Consumer and Business Affairs countywide with a focus on the most vulnerable tenants in unincorporated County areas. Upon execution of the MOU, the County will be able to increase services within the Long Beach courthouse and to Long Beach residents. These services are provided by a bench of service providers under contract to the County. Those teams are led by Los Angeles Legal Aid Foundation and the Liberty Hill Foundation.

The County has existing authorization from the Los Angeles Board of Supervisors to administer and expand the Right-to-Counsel program; however, the City's participation does require approval by the City Council. Participation in the County program will complete the continuum of city services to assist renters, particularly those impacted by COVID-19 and the resulting economic distress. The City administered its own eviction moratorium earlier this year, is administering rental assistance payments to lower income renters as well as a variety

of economic relief programs funded by the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act and other federal dollars. The Right-to-Counsel program provides an important final mechanism for assistance when other programs have failed, and the tenant is facing an eviction.

It is anticipated that an effective Right-to-Counsel program will result in fewer evictions, result in more landlords and tenants accessing rental and mortgage assistance, repayment plan options and other programs, reduce the threat of homelessness that often results from an eviction, and provide time for the housing market to stabilize as the larger economy recovers. While the MOU will contemplate only a one-year term and a \$250,000 amount, mechanisms for extension will be built into the agreement should the need and additional funding be identified for a future extension or expansion of the program.

This matter was reviewed by Deputy City Attorney Richard F. Anthony on November 10, 2020 and by Budget Management Officer Julissa José-Murray on November 12, 2020.

EQUITY STATEMENT

The City has incorporated the Equity Toolkit into this recommendation as requested by the City Council on April 21, 2020. This recommendation will assist Long Beach residents at risk of eviction either directly or indirectly as a result of COVID-19. Those most vulnerable, regardless of income or immigration status, will be prioritized for legal assistance.

City Council action on this matter is requested on December 8, 2020, to allow sufficient time for the City Manager to negotiate and execute the MOU with the County of Los Angeles; and for the services to commence following the December 31, 2020 expiration of the Centers for Disease Control eviction order.

One-time funds of \$250,000 are budgeted in the General Fund Group in the Development Services Department to offset the cost of this program in FY 21. The contract will not be extended unless additional funds to cover such costs are identified and appropriated. This recommendation has no staffing impact beyond the normal budgeted scope of duties and is consistent with existing City Council priorities. The service will be provided by the County and their vendors, pursuant to the negotiated MOU. The expenditure is anticipated to reduce evictions within Long Beach, which would otherwise result in costs to the City in the form of housing assistance, homelessness programs, and public health expenses. There is no local job impact associated with this action.

Approve recommendation.

OSCAR W. ORCI
DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

APPROVED:

THOMAS B. MODICA
CITY MANAGER