



Legislation Text

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City of Alexandria, Virginia

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MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** APRIL 16, 2014

**TO:** THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

**FROM:** RASHAD M. YOUNG, CITY MANAGER /s/

**DOCKET TITLE:**

Consideration of a Grant Application to the Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services to Enhance Jail Diversion Services.

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**ISSUE:** Consideration of an application to the Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS) for one-time funding to enhance the Department Of Community and Human Services (DCHS) jail diversion services in support of appropriate clinical treatment for mentally ill and substance use-disordered individuals in the criminal justice system.

**RECOMMENDATION:** That City Council:

- 1) Authorize the submission of an application to DBHDS for one-time funding in the amount of \$89,221, to be used to assist persons with mental illness and substance use disorders in the Alexandria Detention Center.
- 2) Approve one Senior Therapist (1.0 FTE), fully supported by grant revenues.

This grant-funded position will terminate upon the expiration of the grant, if no alternative funds are identified. The individual who fills this position will be notified of this condition of employment at the time they are hired and will be required to sign an agreement of understanding with regard to this condition.

- 3) Authorize the City Manager to execute all necessary documents that may be required.

**BACKGROUND:** Individuals with mental health and co-occurring substance use disorders are an increasing presence in the criminal justice system. National studies have shown that 6.4 percent of men and 12.2 percent

of women entering U.S. jails have a serious and persistent mental illness, compared to less than 2 percent of the general population. Of these individuals, 72 percent have a co-occurring substance use disorder. Because these individuals who enter jail will return to the community, effective linkage and access to services is critical in reducing the repetitious cycle of criminal justice involvement.

Jail diversion initiatives are aimed at decreasing crime and recidivism by ensuring that timely, appropriate and individualized services are available to persons with mental illness and substance use disorders. There are two primary goals of jail diversion initiatives:

- Diverting persons with serious mental illness (and often co-occurring substance use disorder) away from arrest and into treatment.
- Attempting to prevent persons with mental illness from penetrating more deeply into the correctional system.

The City Council-adopted Alexandria Strategic Plan identifies specific initiatives that support enhancement of jail diversion services. These include: under Goal 2, *Decrease recidivism in the Detention Center through enhanced programming in collaboration with other agencies*; and under Goal 6, *Expand Citywide initiatives and services for persons with mental illnesses to decrease their involvement in the criminal justice system and help them live safe and law-abiding lives in the community*.

Current jail diversion programs and activities in the City include:

- Alexandria Detox/Police Diversion Program
- Jail Based Treatment Services
- Forensic Discharge Planning
- Jail Diversion Subcommittee of the Alexandria Community Criminal Justice Board
- Collaboration for Recovery and ReEntry (CORE)
- Crisis Intervention Team (CIT)
- Re-Entry Council

DCHS staff were notified on March 24, 2014 of a one-time funding opportunity from the Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS) to selected Community Services Boards to support the investigation, development, expansion, or refinement of criminal justice diversion programs. Staff proposes to apply for approximately \$89,221 to address what has been identified as the most significant gap in the City's Jail Diversion continuum: *the lack of early screening and assessment for persons who are arrested and booked into the Adult Detention Center overnight and for diversion from incarceration at the point of their initial arraignment hearing*.

Applications for this funding were due on April 11 and award notifications will be made by April 28, 2014. Funding will be distributed May 16, 2014. No City match is required and there is no requirement for an ongoing funding commitment.

**DISCUSSION:** Advisement hearings are held in Alexandria Monday-Friday at 9:00am. In preparation for these initial court appearances, staff from Alexandria's Pretrial Services complete assessments on all newly-booked inmates; these assessments are then used to write Pretrial Reports provided to judges before Advisement each morning. Because Advisements are held at 9:00 am each weekday, these assessments must be completed very early in the morning, typically around 4:00 am. This schedule, coupled with the lack of DCHS

staffing in Booking during the very early morning hours, results in Pretrial Reports being presented to the Court that often do not include a thorough behavioral health assessment and treatment recommendations. This can result in lengthier and costlier incarcerations for individuals with serious mental illness and/or co-occurring substance use disorders, when more appropriate community treatment alternatives might be preferred and acceptable to the Courts.

Funding would be used to pay for one full-time Senior Therapist (Grade 21) to work 5:00 AM - 1:30 PM Monday-Friday, allowing all individuals in Booking to be clinically assessed and for diversion recommendations to be created, when appropriate, for judicial consideration prior to the early morning arraignment hearings. In addition, this position will provide consultation as needed to security/deputies regarding behavioral or mental health issues. Data will be collected throughout the grant year and used to determine how many individuals are diverted and to determine cost savings and effect on time spent in jail for persons with mental illness.

At its April 3, 2014 meeting, the Alexandria Community Services Board voted unanimously to support the application submission, contingent on City Council approval. Because of the extremely short turn-around time, staff was not able to seek City Council approval prior to submitting the funding application on April 11, 2014. Consequently, the City Manager approved the submission of the grant application, pending City Council approval.

**FISCAL IMPACT:** The application requests \$89,221 in State funds to support one Senior Therapist. The grant period is May 16, 2014 to May 15, 2015 and there are no required matching funds. The City is responsible for the normal administrative activities associated with this grant and existing administrative staffing will provide these functions. Data will be collected throughout the grant year and used to determine the effectiveness of the project. If outcomes reveal that the project is diverting significant numbers of persons away from ongoing incarceration and into community-based treatment, this data may be used to search for alternative funding and/or to reprioritize current DCHS priorities to support the program's continuation. However, if alternative, ongoing funding cannot be secured upon expiration of the grant funds, then as aforementioned, the position will be terminated.

**ATTACHMENTS:**

None

**STAFF:**

Debra R. Collins, Deputy City Manager

Dana Lawhorne, Sheriff

Kate Garvey, Director, Department of Community and Human Services (DCHS)

Carol Layer, Director, Center for Adult Services, DCHS

Liz Wixson, Director, Clinical and Emergency Services, DCHS