



Legislation Text

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City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: SEPTEMBER 2, 2015

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: MARK B. JINKS, 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.

ISSUE: Consideration of an application to the Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS) for ongoing funding to enhance the Department of Community and Human Services (DCHS) jail diversion services aimed at helping individuals with mental illness and substance use-disorders live law-abiding lives in our community.

RECOMMENDATION: That City Council:

- 1) Authorize the submission of an application to DBHDS for ongoing funding in the amount of \$124,039 to be used to assist persons with mental illness and substance use disorders in the Alexandria Detention Center.
- 2) Approve an increase of one Senior Therapist (1.0 FTE) and three hours each week of Psychiatric time, fully supported by grant revenues.
- 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) and a Crisis Intervention Team Assessment Center (CITAC)
- Re-Entry Council

DCHS staff was notified on July 12, 2015 of an ongoing 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 \$124,039 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*.

This application is very similar to the application which was approved by City Council at the April 22, 2014 meeting for submission, but was not selected for funding. One key difference in the current application is that these state funds are ongoing. Last year's solicitation was for one-time funding and the solicitation did not allow for the Department to submit letters of support, timelines and an expansive proposal. However, this opportunity did allow for the submission of a much more robust proposal.

Applications for this funding were due on August 17 and award notifications will be made by September 4, 2015. A memorandum (see attached) was sent to City Council on July 27, 2015 alerting Council to the grant request and associated deadlines. Funding is ongoing and no City match is required.

DISCUSSION: Advisement hearings are held in Alexandria Monday-Friday at 9:00 AM. 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 3:00 AM - 11:30 AM Monday-Friday, allowing for 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. Funding is also requested to pay for three hours of psychiatric time each week so that diverted clients have immediate access to medication services, an often critical component of their recovery. 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 July 23, 2015 meeting, the Alexandria Community Criminal Justice Board voted to support the application submission, contingent on City Council approval. Because of the short turn-around time, staff was not able to seek City Council approval prior to submitting the funding application on August 17, 2015. Consequently, the City Manager approved the submission of the grant application, pending City Council approval.

FISCAL IMPACT: The application requests \$124,039 in State funds to support one Senior Therapist and three hours each week of psychiatric time. State funds are ongoing and no local match is required.

The City is responsible for the administrative activities associated with this grant and existing administrative staff will carry out these functions. There are no funds available in the DCHS budget to continue the grant activities should grant funding ever terminate.

Grant funding will be used for the Senior Therapist position and the individual who fills this grant-funded position will be notified that it may terminate if grant funds become unavailable in the future. The employee will also be required to sign an agreement of understanding about this as a condition of employment at the time they are hired. If grant funding becomes unavailable in the future, outcome data will be analyzed to determine the project's effectiveness and may be used to search for alternative funding and/or to reprioritize current DCHS funding to support the program's continuation. If, however, grant funding becomes unavailable and alternative ongoing funding cannot be secured, the position will be eliminated.

ATTACHMENTS:

City Council July 27, 2015 Memorandum

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