



City Council Report

Date: July 8, 2020
To: City Council
Through: Christopher J. Brady, City Manager
From: Jim Smith, City Attorney
John L. Belatti, City Prosecutor
Subject: ACESF (Arizona Coronavirus Emergency Supplemental Funding)
federal grant awarded by the Arizona Criminal Justice Commission
(Citywide)

Purpose and Recommendation

The purpose of this report is to notify the Council of a grant award and to request a resolution authorizing its acceptance. The requested resolution will authorize the City Manager to enter into a contract on behalf of the City with the Arizona Criminal Justice Commission to receive federal funding through the Arizona Coronavirus Emergency Supplemental Funding Program totaling \$54,197 over a two-year period. The funding would primarily be used for overtime and temporary staff to supplement multiple empty positions in the Mesa Prosecutor's Office that are currently frozen due to the financial impact of COVID-19, thereby allowing the office to maintain high-level services and protections to the community at large and to crime victims in Mesa. The funds would also be used for additional COVID-related supplies such as hand sanitizer, cleaning supplies, and antiseptic wipes to ensure public and employee safety. It is recommended to approve this resolution, as the funding will allow the Prosecutor's Office to maintain important services for the citizens of Mesa and for crime victims in the Mesa Municipal Court.

Background

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted communities around the world. The short-term economic impact has been severe. To help mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on criminal justice organizations, the Arizona Criminal Justice Commission has offered the Arizona Coronavirus Emergency Supplemental Funding Program, making \$11 million in federal grant funds available to the many criminal justice organizations in Arizona. Grant funds are awarded for a 2-year period. Following the application process, 62 different organizations were awarded funds. The Mesa City Prosecutor's Office was awarded \$54,197 to be used for personnel expenses and operating expenses for the time period of 1/20/2020 through 1/20/2022.

Discussion

According to the Mesa Police Department reports, there were 6,858 person crimes and 9,682 property crimes reported in the City of Mesa during 2019. During the fiscal year 2018/19, the Mesa City Prosecutor's office prosecuted nearly 2,000 cases involving domestic violence and 1,503 cases involving DUI. Within the Prosecutor's Office, the Legal Services Specialist (LSS) position is vital to the success of the office due to the monumental amount of work they do behind the scenes.

Legal Services Specialists (LSS's) enter cases received from the Mesa Police Department into the case management system, order evidence, respond in person or by telephone to public defenders, private counsel, victims, defendants, and other government agency personnel to answer questions or address concerns regarding evidence, victim/witness statements, restitution, the state's offer, and schedule interviews. They provide information regarding the sequence of events of the court's processing of in-custody/jail cases, arraignment courtroom processes as well as the possible consequences of criminal cases. LSS's complete appropriate legal forms relating to specific cases such as motions, notices, correspondence, and they convey plea offers, file forms with the court, and write up plea agreements during pre-trial sessions. LSS's operate computerized records systems by entering statistical information and accessing specialized databases to obtain information such as criminal charges, hearing dates, and criminal histories. They review criminal histories, motor vehicle records, and police reports to ascertain what additional information, beyond what is routinely gathered, may be needed.

The funds provided by this grant will help provide necessary coverage for the multiple vacant LSS positions in the Prosecutor's Office that will remain frozen for the foreseeable future as a result of COVID-19's impact on budgets. Funding for employee overtime and temporary staff will provide additional coverage so the office can continue to serve the people of Mesa and seek justice for its citizens and the victims affected by criminal activity in the City of Mesa. Coverage will include support for all courtrooms, including the dedicated specialty Courts that include: Veteran's Court, Community Court and our Rule 11 Court that deal with defendants who may be suffering from mental health issues. We have Prosecutors and Legal Services Specialists dedicated to these areas to assist special populations within the City of Mesa. Our Veterans and Community courtrooms assist our veteran population and our homeless/drug addicted population by providing them with services to address permanent housing issues/joblessness and drug issues they are experiencing, which is needed even more today due to COVID-19.

Alternatives

The alternative to approving acceptance of the ACESF grant funding is to deny it. Such action would require the Prosecutor's Office to continue operating at a significant shortage in personnel. Approving the grant would allow the office to

mitigate the shortage caused by COVID-19 to some degree.

Fiscal Impact

There is no change to the fiscal impact to the City in accepting the ACESF grant funding. It is always a concern, particularly where staff positions are involved, whether grant funding will be maintained by the funding source. However, in this instance, the funds are likely to only be used to fund overtime and temporary staff. The ACESF grant award project period currently covers a two-year period.

Coordinated With

This grant applies only to criminal justice agencies and the award in this instance is specific to the Mesa Prosecutor's Office. No coordination was necessary.