



## Recommendation for Action

**File #:** 21-3357, **Agenda Item #:** 40.

11/18/2021

### **Posting Language**

Authorize negotiation and execution of Amendment No. 6 with Texas RioGrande Legal Aid, Inc. to expand outreach, education, and advocacy services for low-income tenants, to add one 12-month extension option beginning January 1, 2022 in an amount not to exceed \$460,000, for a total agreement amount not to exceed \$3,030,000.

### **Lead Department**

Austin Public Health.

### **Fiscal Note**

Funding in the amount of \$460,000 is available in the Fiscal Year 2021-2022 Austin Public Health Department Operating Budget.

### **Prior Council Action:**

December 10, 2020 - Council authorized negotiation and execution of Amendment No. 5 to an agreement with Texas RioGrande Legal Aid, Inc. for tenant advocacy services to add a 12-month extension option in an amount not to exceed \$460,000, for a total agreement amount not to exceed \$2,570,000, on an 11-0 vote.

January 23, 2020 - Council authorized negotiation and execution of Amendment No. 4 to an agreement with Texas RioGrande Legal Aid, Inc. for tenant advocacy services to increase funding in an amount not to exceed \$140,000 for the remaining 12-month extension option, for a total agreement amount not to exceed \$2,110,000, on a 10-0 vote with Mayor Adler absent.

December 13, 2018 - Council authorized Ordinance No. 20181213-023 to increase funding for tenant resident advocacy services in an amount not to exceed \$110,000 for each remaining 12-month extension option, for a total agreement not to exceed \$1,970,000, on a 7-1 vote with Council Member Troxclair voting nay.

December 17, 2015 - Council authorized the initial agreement for a 12-month term from January 1, 2016 with four 12-month extension options, in an amount not to exceed \$350,000, for a total contract amount not to exceed \$1,750,000, on an 8-2 vote with Council Members Troxclair and Zimmerman voting nay and Council Member Gallo abstaining.

### **For More Information:**

Adrienne Sturup, Interim Director, 512-972-5167; Laura LaFuente, Interim Assistant Director, Health Equity and Community Engagement Division, 512-972-5077; Akeshia Johnson Smothers, Community Based Resources Unit Manager, 512-972-5567; Estella Kirscht, Acting Agenda Coordinator, 512-972-4423.

### **Additional Backup Information:**

Texas RioGrande Legal Aid is a non-profit organization that provides free legal services to low-income residents in sixty-eight counties of Southwest Texas. Texas RioGrande Legal Aid is the third largest legal services provider in the nation and the largest in the state of Texas. Texas RioGrande Legal Aid performs proactive education and outreach to inform residents of their rights as tenants at rental properties and mobile

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home parks, forwards complaints regarding substandard building conditions, and begins nuisance abatement efforts on behalf of tenants. Texas RioGrande Legal Aid employs experienced English and Spanish speaking outreach professionals who have expertise in housing laws and empowers tenants to take actions to improve conditions despite their fears of retaliation.

A 2015 report by the Entrepreneurship and Community Development Clinic of the University of Texas Law School titled "An Analysis of Austin's Repeat Offender Program and Efforts to Address Dangerous Rental Properties" found the City faces great needs in identifying dangerous rental properties, adequately monitoring repeat offenders, and utilizing appropriate enforcement mechanisms in handling rental-property nuisances. As part of the Fiscal Year 2016 Budget, City Council provided funding for an initiative called the Residents Advocacy Project, which aimed to improve the City's response to rental properties with dangerous conditions and nuisances, and short-term rental housing enforcement.

The goals of the Advocacy Project include: 1) educate tenants that reside within the City of Austin on their legal rights, 2) through investigation, outreach, and referrals from the Austin Code Department, identify tenants that reside at substandard rental properties, 3) work with tenants to advocate for their rights as tenants, including ensuring landlords make needed repairs as required by law, and 4) counsel and represent tenants unlawfully targeted for eviction.

Amendment No. 5 exercised the fifth extension option beginning January 1, 2021.

Amendment No. 4 exercised the fourth extension option beginning January 1, 2020.

Amendment No. 3 added \$110,000 to each remaining extension option and exercised the third extension option beginning January 1, 2019.

Amendment No. 2 exercised the second extension option beginning January 1, 2018.

Amendment No. 1 exercised the first extension option beginning January 1, 2017.

On December 17, 2015 Council approved the initial contract with Texas RioGrande Legal Aid, Inc. to provide education and outreach services for tenants' rights for a 12-month term extending from January 1, 2016 to December 31, 2016 and four 12-month extension options.

**Strategic Outcome(s):**

Economic Opportunity and Affordability.