



Legislation Text

File #: 22-5411, **Version:** 1

Department: County Administration

Department Head/Elected Official: David Berry, County Administrator

Regular or Supplemental RCA: Regular RCA

Type of Request: Financial Authorization

Project ID (if applicable): ARPA_CRTBLOG, ARPA_BODYCAMERA, ARPA_EVIDENCEMG, ARPA_TRIAGE, ARPA_CAC

Vendor/Entity Legal Name (if applicable): N/A

MWDBE Contracted Goal (if applicable): N/A

MWDBE Current Participation (if applicable): N/A

Justification for 0% MWDBE Participation Goal: N/A - Goal not applicable to request

Request Summary (Agenda Caption):

Request by the Office of County Administration for approval of \$20,155,823 in ARPA Local Fiscal Recovery Funds for continuation and expansion of Court Backlog reduction activities together with investment in child abuse prevention, evidence preservation, and treatment efforts.

Background and Discussion: During the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of cases in the Court Backlog, defined as misdemeanors aged over 180 days or felony cases aged over 360 days, rapidly increased. To accelerate processing of cases in the backlog, Commissioners Court approved a comprehensive set of initiatives in late 2021 and early 2022 including:

- Establishment of Emergency Response Dockets
- Hiring Associate Judges to expand trial capacity
- Adding staff within the District Attorney's Office, District Courts, District Clerk's Office, Public Defender's Office, Community Supervision and Corrections Department, and County Courts
- Expanding jury services and jury facilities, including establishing additional jury operations at NRG and in the Family Law Center
- Expediting access to evidence, including funding additional evidence retrieval by the District Attorney's Office as well as body camera and 911 tape retrieval by the Sheriff's Office
- Initiating a triage program within the District Attorney's Office to review one-time, low-level offenses and quickly bring them to disposition

These efforts are beginning to yield results. The number of misdemeanor cases in the backlog is down 20% from January 2022, while the number of felony cases in backlog status has declined by 16%.

This funding request will allow approved positions to continue to be funded through FY 23, will expand

evidence retrieval activities, and will extend the District Attorney's triage project for an additional year.

This request also incorporates new efforts to address child abuse by the Children's Assessment Center (CAC). Five initiatives will help improve processing time and reduce client backlog while continuing to offer treatment free of charge to thousands of children each year:

- Initiate a digital conversion project to convert 34,500 VHS tapes to a digital format and index videos
- Upgrade medical digital capture technology through the purchase of four new colposcopes and two high-quality printers
- Implement single session intake and therapy, reducing the wait time for children to receive counseling
- Enhance training for mental health professionals
- Expand community prevention training to reach 3,000-4,000 more community members each year, particularly in schools

These initiatives will help preserve evidence, decrease processing and wait times, meet increased demand, and improve the CAC's ability to testify and provide information to the Harris County District Attorney's Office and law enforcement.

This additional funding brings the total committed to Court Backlog efforts to \$36.9 million:

	Previously Approved	New Request	Total Investment
DCA District Courts - 700	\$ 2,758,006	\$ 2,607,298	\$ 5,365,304
District Attorney - 545	\$ 6,896,632	\$ 12,502,078	\$ 19,398,710
DCO District Clerk - 550	\$ 1,033,739	\$ 977,691	\$ 2,011,430
Sheriff's Office - 540	\$ 1,959,089	\$ 391,494	\$ 2,350,583
Community Supervision - 601	\$ 1,968,630	\$ 895,505	\$ 2,864,135
CCCL County Courts - 940	\$ 483,946	\$ 487,684	\$ 971,630
PDO Public Defender - 560	\$ 890,392	\$ 750,074	\$ 1,640,466
FPM Facilities - 035	\$ 755,244		\$ 755,244
Children's Assessment Center		\$ 1,544,000	\$ 1,544,000
Total	\$ 16,745,678	\$ 20,155,823	\$ 36,901,501

Expected Impact: Continued reduction of the court backlog, reduction in case processing times, and reduced incidence of child abuse.

Alternative Options: Halt court backlog activities; allow current positive trends to reverse, increasing time to case resolution and the jail population.

Alignment with Goal(s):

- X Justice and Safety
- _ Economic Opportunity
- _ Housing
- _ Public Health
- _ Transportation
- _ Flooding

☐ Environment
☒ Governance and Customer Service

Prior Court Action (if any):

Date	Agenda Item #	Action Taken
7/20/2021	183	Approval of District Clerk positions and Emergency Response Docket creation
8/10/2021	14	Approval of District Courts and Public Defender staffing, creation of additional Emergency Response Dockets, and body-worn camera evidence retrieval efforts
8/24/2021	13	Approval of extension of NRG Jury operations
9/11/2021	4	Approval of District Court positions, County Courts Emergency Response Dockets, Public Defender's Office funding, and additional bodyworn camera funding
10/12/2021	18	Approval of funding for Evidence Management together with funding and positions for Associate Judges
10/26/2021	20	Approval of funding and end-date extensions for clerk positions for NRG operations
12/14/2021	18	Approval of temporary positions for the Sheriff's Office to process backlog of 911 audio requests
2/22/2022	22	Approval to fund court backlog initiatives through SFY 22 and relocation of Jury Operations to the Family Law Center
5/10/2022	174	Approval of District Courts Case Management Coordinator positions

Location:

Address (if applicable):

Precinct(s): Countywide

Fiscal and Personnel Summary			
Service Name	Multiple (Efforts to reduce Court Backlog)		
	SFY 22	FY 23	Next 3 FYs
Incremental Expenditures (do NOT write values in thousands or millions)			
Labor Expenditures	\$	\$ 19,014,492	\$
Non-Labor Expenditures	\$	\$ 1,141,331	\$
Total Incremental Expenditures	\$	\$ 20,155,823	\$
Funding Sources (do NOT write values in thousands or millions)			
Existing Budget			
Choose an item.	\$	\$	\$
Choose an item.	\$	\$	\$

Choose an item.	\$	\$	\$
Total Current Budget	\$	\$	\$
Additional Budget Requested			
2651 - American Rescue Plan 2021	\$	\$ 20,155,823	\$
Choose an item.	\$	\$	\$
Choose an item.	\$	\$	\$
Total Additional Budget Requested	\$	\$ 20,155,823	\$
Total Funding Sources	\$	\$ 20,155,823	\$
Personnel (Fill out section only if requesting new PCNs)			
Current Position Count for Service	-	-	-
Additional Positions Requested	-	-	-
Total Personnel	-	-	-

Anticipated Court Date: 9/13/2022

Anticipated Implementation Date (if different from Court date):10/1/2022

Emergency/Disaster Recovery Note: COVID-19 related item

Contact(s) name, title, department: Perrye Turner, Deputy County Administrator Justice & Safety, Office of County Administration, Gayatri Garg, Director Performance Analysis, Office of Management & Budget

Attachments (if applicable): N/A