

Response to Questions on the FY 2016 Budget

Request By: Chairman Bulova

Question: Please provide a summary of the Legal Services Contract for Persons with Disabilities program, including a discussion of any revenue that would reduce the net cost of the reduction.

Response: The Department of Family Services contracts with Legal Services of Northern Virginia (LSNV) to administer the Legal Services for Persons with Disabilities program. This contract provides legal assistance for low income people with disabilities who are unable to work in the areas of Social Security appeals, disability rights, housing, employment, transportation, healthcare, Medicaid, family, education or financial legal matters. The program also provides free legal counsel to low income people with disabilities who have faced discrimination and are not able to afford legal counsel on their own in the areas of housing, employment, transportation, and public accommodations. In addition, training and technical assistance on these topics for DFS staff and customers are also provided, as well as an ongoing public education campaign.

One of the services provided through this program assists people with disabilities who are permanently unable to work, appeal Social Security Disability claims that were previously denied by the Social Security Administration (SSA). Priority is given to customers referred by DFS who are beneficiaries of the County's General Relief program. By transitioning people from County General Relief payments to Social Security benefits, costs are shifted from the County to the federal government. Additionally, once a customer successfully transitions from County General Relief to federal Social Security benefits, the County receives reimbursements from the SSA for payments made to DFS customers from the County's General Relief funds during the interim period that the customer's disability claim was denied. These refunds represent General Relief dollars that the County would not have spent if the customer's disability claim was approved by the SSA when they first applied. The refund is backdated to when the customer first applied for Social Security benefits. It should be noted that the County receives reimbursements for claims that are successfully appealed regardless of whether a customer receives services through this program.

As the reimbursements are meant to refund money that would not have otherwise been expended by the County, these repayments free-up General Relief funds making them available to serve additional customers. However, this does not result in additional revenue to the County and therefore there is no net decrease to the cost of the program. Refunds to the County from the SSA for General Relief payments through the legal services contract vary from year to year. Below are the total refund amounts recovered over the last two years:

- FY 2013--\$16,720
- FY 2014--\$21,340