



Circuit Court for Howard County
Office of Court Administrator
8360 Court Avenue
Ellicott City, Maryland
21043

Suzanne H. James
Court Administrator

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September 12, 2008


Mr. Lonnie R. Robbins
Chief Administrative Officer
Howard County Government
3430 Courthouse Drive
Ellicott City, Maryland 21043

Dear Mr. *Lonnie* Robbins:

Please find attached the testimony of the Circuit Court for Howard County regarding SAO No. 2 – Fiscal 2009. This legislation appropriates \$19,856 in State grant funds from the Maryland Administrative Office of the Courts, Department of Family Administration. The funds will be used to continue the Court's CINA and TPR mediation programs. No County matching funds are required in conjunction with the acceptance of this grant from the State.

If any additional information is required, please so advise. The Court appreciates the support of the Administration in requesting that the County Council appropriate these supplemental State funds.

Sincerely yours,


Suzanne H. James
Court Administrator

Attachment

cc: ✓ Jennifer Sager, Legislative Coordinator
Thomas W. Mullenix, Budget Analyst
Steven E. Welkos, Fiscal Specialist

TESTIMONY OF HOWARD COUNTY CIRCUIT COURT
Supplementary Budget & Appropriation Ordinance
No. 2 – Fiscal 2009

The Circuit Court for Howard County is requesting County Council approval for a supplementary appropriation from the County Grants Fund's Contingency Reserve for \$19,856. The source of the funds is a grant from the Maryland Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC), Department of Family Administration, Foster Care Court Improvement Project. The funds will be used to continue the Court's Children in Need of Assistance (CINA) and Termination of Parental Rights (TPR) Mediation Program as well as the salary for a Juvenile Court Specialist.

Background:

Children in Need of Assistance (CINA) and Termination of Parental Rights (TPR) cases involve children alleged to have been abused or neglected. The goal of CINA and TPR cases is to try to keep children safe and to help families create a safe home for their children. The Court plays a critical role providing judicial oversight for all parties involved in the case. There are currently 84 open cases that are reviewed by the Court frequently. The Court presided over 411 hearings for the families involved in these cases during calendar year 2007. CINA and TPR cases typically have more hearings yearly than any other case type. In an effort to reduce contested hearings and to provide children with a safe and stable home in a timely manner, the Court initiated a mediation program in 2004. Mediation is a confidential and informal process used to assist parties in solving problems. The Court has used mediation to reach agreements on issues such as permanency planning, visitation, family services, termination of parental rights and open adoption agreements. The mediations are used to provide open communication with the parties. If an agreement is reached at the mediation, it is presented to the Court. The Court, at its own discretion, may incorporate the agreement into an Order.

In an effort to improve communication between the Court and all parties, the Court implemented a system to provide Court Orders immediately following a hearing. The Juvenile Court Specialist works for the Court at the direction of either a Master or a Judge. The Juvenile Court Specialist prepares the Order from the Court proceeding. This task enables all parties to leave a hearing with clear language that describes all expectations of the Court. In the past, the delay in the distribution of Court Orders prevented families from receiving important and time-sensitive services immediately after a hearing.

The Maryland AOC, Department of Family Administration annually awards grants to Courts and related agencies that serve the families of Maryland. The Foster Care Court Improvement Project, a part of the Family Administration, annually holds a competition to distribute grant funds to Courts and related agencies serving youth in foster care. These grants are designed to eliminate barriers for foster care children.

Current Request:

Through this grant, the Circuit Court for Howard County plans to continue serving the families involved in CINA and related TPR proceedings. The mediation program is an excellent program that allows a neutral person to assist parties in discussing issues that are important to them. Many parents involved in these cases feel that this environment gives them an opportunity to be heard. Additionally, with the use of the Juvenile Court Specialist, all families are able to leave hearings with Court Orders. Court Orders provide clear expectations for the next hearing.

In closing, appropriation of these State grant funds by the County Council will greatly help families that are involved in child abuse and neglect cases in Howard County. The costs to provide these programs will require no outlay of County funds as there are no matching requirements. Thank you for taking the time to consider this supplementary appropriation ordinance.



HOWARD COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE

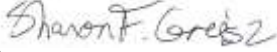
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Sharon Greisz, Director, Department of Finance
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September 9, 2008

To: Lonnie R. Robbins
Chief Administrative Officer

From: Sharon F. Greisz 
Director of Finance

Re: SAO No. 2 Certification

I hereby certify that funds are unencumbered and available for transfer as follows:

FROM:

051-490-8903-1000-0607	Grants Fund, Contingency Reserve	\$19,856
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TO:

051-210-0106-2000-0107	Circuit Court – TPR Case Mediation – Other Compensation	\$ 9,856
051-210-0106-2000-0206	Circuit Court – TPR Case Mediation – Professional Services	\$ 9,600
051-210-0106-2000-0301	Circuit Court – TPR Case Mediation – Office Supplies	\$ 400

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