

## STAFF REPORT

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**Date:** January 17, 2024

**To:** Mayor and City Council

**Through:** Doug Thornley, City Manager

**Subject:** Staff Report (For Possible Action): Acceptance of the Fiscal Year 2023 (FY 2023) Community Courts Initiative, from the Department of Justice (DOJ), Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) to the Reno Municipal Court in the amount of \$899,976.

**From:** Veronica Lopez, Court Administrator

**Department:** Reno Municipal Court

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**Summary:**

The Reno Municipal Court was awarded a federal grant from the Department of Justice (DOJ), Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA), in the amount of \$899,976, to enhance its Community Court.

| <b>Consent Review</b>  | <b>Yes</b> | <b>No</b> |
|--|------------|-----------|
| 1. Is this item an annual or standard item that comes before Council for regular approval? |            | <b>X</b>  |
| 2. Is this item an agreement required based on an item previously approved by Council?     |            | <b>X</b>  |
| 3. Is this item included in the current budget approved and adopted by Council?            |            | <b>X</b>  |
| <b>Other Considerations</b>  |            |           |
| What percent of the total City budget does this item represent?                            |            | <b>0%</b> |

**Alignment with Strategic Plan:**

Public Safety

Economic Opportunity, Homelessness, and Affordable Housing

**Previous Council Action:**

Council previously approved three grant awards from the DOJ BJA to the Reno Municipal Court to support the specialty court programs. All three grants were approved during the December 2, 2020, Reno City Council and Redevelopment Agency Board meeting. The first grant, awarded to the Fresh Start Therapeutic Court, was in the amount of \$500,000. The second grant, awarded to

the Community Court, was in the amount of \$183,042. The third grant, awarded to the CAMO-RNO Veterans Treatment Court, was in the amount of \$296,570.

**Discussion:**

The Reno Municipal Court is a court of limited jurisdiction located in Reno, Nevada. The court addresses misdemeanor criminal violations of the Reno Municipal Code (RMC) and Nevada Revised Statutes (NRS) committed within the city limits. A group of these offenses have become known as “quality of life” (QOL) offenses and consist of: Urinating in Public, Trespassing, Pedestrian Violations, Bicycle Violations, Defrauding a Proprietor, Open Container of Alcohol, Soliciting Money or Business, Sitting or Lying on a Sidewalk, Illegal Dumping (littering), and Camping in a Park in Violation of Park Hours. Reno Municipal Court judges observed that a vast number of QOL violations were being committed by repeat offenders concentrated within the downtown Reno Business Improvement District (BID). In addition, it became apparent that many of these repeat offenders were either homeless or unstably housed.

Reno Municipal Court held its first Community Court docket on March 6, 2019. The objective of the Community Court is to interrupt the cycle of recidivism for downtown QOL offenders and incentivize them to come to court by providing a low-stress environment with on-site access to local human service and treatment providers. Access to said services and providers in lieu of traditional criminal penalties (i.e., fines and incarceration), should bring down the barriers that are causing repeat offenders to commit QOL crimes. Following a yearlong hiatus beginning in March 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Community Court relaunched on April 7, 2021, with a newly appointed judge and has continued to grow in the number of participants, staff members, and services provided.

Coffee and pastries are available to all court participants, and bag lunches are provided by the Washoe County Sheriff’s Office (WCSO). Community Court is held every Wednesday morning in the Washoe County Downtown Library, a garden-like setting that is familiar to the homeless community in Reno, and that is secure but less intimidating than a traditional courthouse. After undergoing a risk/needs assessment, participants are linked immediately with their case manager who then refers them to on-site service providers. Services include but are not limited to, substance use treatment, mental health treatment, primary healthcare, housing referral agencies, governmental benefits, and a Veteran’s Administration (VA) representative. To ensure compliance, status review hearings are held on a weekly or bi-weekly basis, depending on the participant’s treatment plan. Furthermore, the Community Court case manager checks in regularly with participants via phone and/or email to provide any additional support. In order to give back to the community and achieve restorative justice, community service is the only sanction imposed at Community Court.

In addition to reducing recidivism, the main objective of Community Court is procedural justice. At all times participants are treated with dignity and respect. They are involved in every aspect of their case. There are no surprises. Every participant, each individual, is a valued member of this community.

There are four primary goals of this project: (1) hire a second, full-time, Case Manager dedicated to assisting with Community Court; (2) contract with a second legal defender; (3) provide temporary housing to the program's participants; and (4) take the necessary steps to become a Certified Mentor Community Court and be recognized as such at a national level.

**Financial Implications:**

The required 25% percent match for this award is \$224,994, which is an in-kind match using the salary and benefits of the Specialty Court Case Manager assigned to this program. This will not impact Reno Municipal Court's operating budget.

**Legal Implications:**

The Reno Municipal Court agrees to comply with the terms of the grant requirements, provide information for evaluation to the grantor, and provide progress and financial reports on program activities, which will be completed by the Reno Municipal Court. Failure to adhere to the grant requirements could affect future funding.

**Recommendation:**

Staff recommends Council approve the grant award from the Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance to the Reno Municipal Court, in the amount of \$899,976 to enhance its Community Court.

**Proposed Motion:**

Move to approve the grant award from the Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance to the Reno Municipal Court, in the amount of \$899,976, to enhance its Community Court.

**Attachments:**

Presentation