

MOTION BY SUPERVISOR MARK RIDLEY-THOMAS

MAY 3, 2016

Improving Access to Legal Services for Justice

The Self-Help Legal Access Center (SHLAC) program meets a critical need in Los Angeles County (County) by providing information and resources to residents who are representing themselves in Superior Court without the assistance of an attorney. Access to the justice system through self-representation is one of the country's most basic and cherished democratic rights. The SHLAC program, administered by the Department of Consumer and Business Affairs (DCBA), has served over one million self-represented litigants since it began in November 2000. The SHLAC program provides information on a variety of cases including family law, landlord tenant, and civil complaints. The SHLAC program is currently funded by both the General Fund, with an equally divided allocation across the five supervisorial districts, and supervisorial district funding.

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MOTION BY SUPERVISOR MARK RIDLEY-THOMAS
MAY 3, 2016
PAGE 2

The SHLAC program provides access to justice for a growing number of County residents who cannot afford legal representation, either as a plaintiff or a defendant. A 2013 evaluation found the SHLACs were universally valued by the County judges and court supervisors, and customers were very satisfied with the services that they received.

Recent data shows, however, that there is great variation in the availability of services, use of volunteers, and productivity at the various sites. Some of the variation reflects limitations at the particular site. For example, the Inglewood SHLAC is the only Center that operates in a court that does not have any family law courtrooms. As a result, few family law litigants get served from this geographic area.

In October 2015, the DCBA released a request for proposals (RFP) for the ongoing operation of the program. This new RFP offers a good opportunity for the Board of Supervisors to better standardize and monitor the program to ensure Countywide efficacy.

I THEREFORE MOVE THAT THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS direct the Director of the Department of Consumer and Business Affairs to:

- 1) Provide written quarterly workload reports for each Self-Help Legal Access Center (SHLAC) that includes the number and types of cases received and consumers served by location.
- 2) Contract with a consultant to evaluate the current and future needs of self-represented litigants, and provide the findings in a written report by December

MOTION BY SUPERVISOR MARK RIDLEY-THOMAS
MAY 3, 2016
PAGE 3

2016. Among other things this report should include recommendations on improvements that can be made to the SHLAC program to maximize efficacy.

- 3) Provide a written report 60 days after the consultant's report with recommendations on how the consultant's findings can be adopted and implemented in the SHLAC program going forward.

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