



Board Agenda Item 48

DATE: September 9, 2025

TO: Board of Supervisors

SUBMITTED BY: Sanja Bugay, Director, Department of Social Services

SUBJECT: Agreement with Youth Law Center for Bypass Policy Consultation Services

RECOMMENDED ACTION(S):

- 1. Under Administrative Policy No. 34 for competitive bids or requests for proposals (AP 34), determine that an exception to the competitive bidding requirement under AP 34 is satisfied and Suspension of Competition is warranted due to unusual or extraordinary circumstances, and that the best interests of the County would be served by entering into an agreement with Youth Law Center as this vendor is uniquely qualified to provide consultation services for Child Welfare Staff and is able to assist the Department immediately; and**
- 2. Approve and authorize the Chairman to execute an Agreement with Youth Law Center for consultation services, effective upon execution through June 30, 2027, which includes the base contract and one optional one-year extension, total not to exceed \$133,000.**

Approval of the recommended actions will allow the Youth Law Center (YLC) to provide specialized consultation services specifically to evaluate and address issues surrounding the bypass of reunification services. There is no Net County Cost associated with the recommended action. The agreement maximum, including the optional one-year extension, is \$133,000 and will be funded with Title IV-B/2011 Realignment fund. This item is countywide.

ALTERNATIVE ACTION(S):

Should your Board not approve the recommended actions, it will preclude the Department from engaging YLC's consultation services. This limitation would significantly hinder the Department's ability to close critical service gaps for families identified as bypass recommended.

SUSPENSION OF COMPETITION CONTRACT:

It is requested that the County find under AP No. 34 that an exception to the competitive bidding requirement is satisfied, and a suspension of competition is warranted due to unusual and extraordinary circumstances, given YLC's expertise in child welfare services and their established leadership in advocacy for families engaged with the child welfare system. While national organizations such as the National Center for Youth Law and the Child Welfare League of America bring reputable expertise in youth legal advocacy, they lack the embedded, county-specific insight essential for effectively partnering with the Department. Their limited familiarity with Fresno County's unique system dynamics, stakeholder relationships, and policy landscape poses a considerable barrier to providing meaningful, actionable support.

In contrast, the Department is operating under urgent conditions, with the upcoming implementation of the California Automated Response and Engagement System (CARES) requiring immediate elevation of practice standards and full alignment with new regulatory frameworks. This is not a moment for generalized

consultation; it is a time for informed, agile, and locally attuned guidance.

To meet these demands, the Department must engage a provider capable of delivering high-impact support from day one; someone who understands the intricacies of Fresno County's operations and can seamlessly tailor their expertise to meet this critical juncture. Anything less risks undermining the success of CARES implementation and delaying the advancement of vital youth advocacy outcomes.

The YLC is nationally recognized for its deep expertise in child welfare services and its pioneering leadership in family advocacy. Through its flagship program, the Quality Parenting Initiative (QPI), YLC has transformed care standards by promoting strong, nurturing relationships as a foundation for well-being and stability. YLC has also been instrumental in elevating the voices of youth and families in policymaking processes, ensuring that lived experiences guide meaningful reforms.

Leveraging the latest brain and developmental science, YLC's work spans the full developmental spectrum - from infants to young adults - shaping foster care and juvenile justice policies and practices that are evidence-based and participant-driven. Their commitment to excellence in care includes a focus on access to critical transition, health, and educational supports for all youth, regardless of their placement in the child welfare or juvenile justice systems.

In addition, YLC has catalyzed collaboration among faith communities to advocate for and support children in state custody, reinforcing a network of care that extends beyond institutional systems.

YLC's specialized qualifications make them an indispensable resource in addressing the Department's critical service needs. The General Services Department - Purchasing concurs with the Department's assessment that this satisfies the exception to the competitive bidding process required by AP 34.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no increase in Net County Cost associated with the recommended action. The maximum cost for the recommended agreement, including the optional one-year extension, is \$133,000 and will be offset with Title IV-B/2011 Realignment fund. Sufficient appropriations and estimated revenues are included in the Departments Org 5610 FY 2025-26 Recommended Budget and will be included in subsequent budget requests.

DISCUSSION:

The proposed agreement with YLC is a targeted and timely initiative to enhance the County's child welfare practice surrounding bypass determinations. In Child Welfare, a "bypass" allows an agency or court to forego reunification services for a parent, often accelerating termination of parental rights or adoption planning. This decision is typically based on legal criteria, such as prior involvement in the child welfare system or aggravated circumstances. DSS aims to safely reunite children with their families and seeks a legal partner to improve child welfare practices by clarifying bypass procedures and ensuring decisions align with legal standards and the child's best interests. Bypass decisions carry significant consequences for families and children. YLC's nationally recognized expertise in child welfare legal advocacy and their ability to interpret complex statutory frameworks make them the ideal partner to assist the Department in navigating these high-stakes scenarios.

Through this collaboration, the Department will receive specialized consultation focused on improving bypass policy decision-making, report-writing accuracy, case planning under challenging circumstances, and the assessment of reunification readiness. The approach is deeply rooted in legal, scientific, and stakeholder-informed analysis - ensuring that recommendations are not only evidence-based, but responsive to the lived realities of families affected by these determinations.

YLC's comprehensive scope of services, supported by a multidisciplinary team of legal scholars and

developmental science experts, is designed to yield actionable reforms. These reforms will help social workers implement case plans even in situations where acknowledgment of harm is absent, strengthen court reporting procedures, ensure support and resources are provided to parents impacted by bypass recommendations and improve the overall integrity and consistency of bypass-related decision-making.

Notably, the Department's goal of supporting safe reunification and long-term permanency aligns with the outcomes of this partnership. While direct consultation will be provided to Department staff, the ultimate impact will be felt by vulnerable families whose future stability depends on informed, equitable, and legally sound decisions.

The recommended Agreement deviates from the County's standard agreement, as it includes lower requirements for Professional and Cyber liability insurance coverage. Human Resources - Risk Management (HR Risk) has recommended against these lower requirements; however, DSS believes that the risks associated are an acceptable business risk.

YLC has indicated that they are unable to increase their insurance policy limits for Professional and Cyber Liability coverage at this time. While HR Risk recommended coverage levels of \$1,000,000 per occurrence and \$3,000,000 aggregate for Professional Liability, and \$2,000,000 per occurrence for Cyber Liability, YLC has confirmed they can maintain coverage at \$1,000,000 per occurrence and \$1,000,000 aggregate for Professional Liability, and \$1,000,000 per occurrence for Cyber Liability.

Given the low-risk nature of the vendor and the services provided, the Department has made a business decision to proceed with YLC's current coverage levels.

ATTACHMENTS INCLUDED AND/OR ON FILE:

Suspension of Competition Acquisition Request
On file with Clerk - Agreement with YLC

CAO ANALYST:

Ronald Alexander