

CITY OF CHARLOTTESVILLE, VIRGINIA
CITY COUNCIL AGENDA



Agenda Date:	May 5, 2025
Action Required:	Appropriate funding and authorize City Manager to execute Statement of Grant Award (SOGA)
Presenter:	Leslie Burns, April Wimberley, Assistant City Attorney
Staff Contacts:	Taylor Harvey-Ryan, Grants Program Manager
Title:	Resolution to appropriate \$20,000 in Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services - Children's Justice Act One-Time Grant Program funds (1 of 2 readings)

Background

The City of Charlottesville applied for and was awarded \$20,000 from the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services Children's Justice Act (CJA) One-Time Grant Program. The City of Charlottesville intends to renovate an existing conference room to create a child-friendly space within the Charlottesville- Albemarle Juvenile and Domestic Relations (JDR) courthouse.

Discussion

The JDR courthouse itself is a collaboration between the City of Charlottesville and Albemarle County, who co-own the building. The court hears all juvenile and domestic relation matters from both localities. Currently, there are approximately 175 children in the foster care system alone, all of whom have experienced trauma and will likely be required to attend several court hearings. Yet, there is no space within the JDR courthouse designed with children in mind. Children, guardians, attorneys, and others waiting to attend a child welfare hearing mingle together in a single open foyer outside the courtroom. There are two small meeting rooms that parties can use on an ad-hoc basis for privacy or respite from the noisy foyer, but no space dedicated to use by children. We have collaborated with multi-disciplinary experts to design a space in the courthouse for these children that is welcoming and trauma-informed.

The Charlottesville-Albemarle Best Practice Courts Committee (BPC) is made up of representatives of both localities from the judiciary, Social Services, Juvenile Justice, Piedmont Court Appointed Special Advocates, Court Service Unit, and the local JDR bar. In 2023, the BPC identified providing a peaceful, trauma-informed space for children in the JDR courthouse as a priority and has been working collaboratively toward that goal since.

The child-friendly space will be created within an existing conference room in the JDR courthouse. The expert members of the BPC consulted with an additional expert in children's trauma and trauma-informed design to develop a comprehensive plan for transforming the space. The plan includes soundproofing to minimize noise from the adjacent courtroom, child-sized furniture and work surfaces, trauma-informed books and toys for various ages and abilities, and an overall soothing and

welcoming aesthetic.

Modifications to the existing space include:

- Installation of hat channeling and felt “clouds” to filter noise from courtroom proceedings
- Installation of child-sized furniture and work surfaces
- Installation of soft floor covering
- Painting and decorating with soothing, natural colors and textures
- Installation of bookshelf supplied with books and coloring books in English and Spanish
- Installation of light table and accessories

Alignment with City Council's Vision and Strategic Plan

Partnerships: The courthouse is jointly owned by the City and County, and the Best Practice Committee is comprised of members of the child welfare community of both localities. The project represents a partnership among staff from multiple departments of both localities, as well as members of the larger community such as attorneys who serve as guardians ad litem and a non-profit organization that trains and supervises court advocates serving children. Investing in this child-friendly space emphasizes the care and concern our larger community has for the young people who are participants in challenging court proceedings. Indeed, this project serves as an example of partners coming together to care for some of the most vulnerable members of our community.

Community Engagement

N/A

Budgetary Impact

There is no budgetary impact to the City as this project will be supported by grant funds from the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services.

Recommendation

Staff recommends approval and appropriation of grant funds and execution of the Statement of Grant Award.

Alternatives

Council may decline the grant.

Attachments

1. CJA Resolution
2. Statement of Grant Award/ Acceptance