

**18739**

**TO:** Honorable Members of the Board of Acquisition and Contract

**FROM:** Diane G. Balistreri  
Coordinator, Office for Women

**DATE:** April 26, 2011

**SUBJECT:** Authority to exempt from the Westchester County Procurement Policy an agreement with My Sisters' Place, Inc. to provide various non-residential domestic violence services pursuant to Section 3(a)(xxi)

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Authority is hereby requested from your Honorable Board to exempt from the Westchester County Procurement Policy an agreement with My Sisters' Place, Inc. ("My Sisters' Place") for provision of the following non-residential domestic violence services:

- support services to victims, whether eligible or ineligible for public assistance, through its Community Counseling and Advocacy Program (CCAP); and
- legal services in Yonkers to women victims.

The proposed agreement will be for the period January 1, 2011 to December 31, 2011, for an amount not-to-exceed Six Hundred Seventy-Seven Thousand Eight Hundred Seventy-Five Dollars (\$677,875), to be paid quarterly pursuant to an approved budget, of which \$470,544 shall be dedicated to these services (\$379,274 for non-residential support services and \$91,270 for legal services).

Please be advised that Section 459-c of the New York Social Services Law directs social services districts, such as the County, to offer and provide non-residential services to victims of domestic violence, whether eligible or ineligible for public assistance. Non-residential services programs must have the ability to provide the following services:

- 1) Information and Referral services
- 2) Advocacy
- 3) Counseling
- 4) Community education and outreach activities
- 5) Hotline services

Since 1992, My Sisters' Place has provided non-residential domestic violence support services to the County through contracts administered through the Office for Women pursuant to the Department of Social Services Consolidated Services Plan as updated annually. My Sisters' Place has carried out its contractual responsibilities in a capable and professional manner. It is especially qualified to provide these services by reason of its expertise, leadership and longevity in the field, and because of its intimate connection with residential domestic violence services.

My Sisters' Place began providing legal services in 1997. The program serves women for representation in domestic violence, support, custody and visitation litigation, enabling those women to leave their abusive partners and survive independently. It has in the past successfully provided these services to over 8,500 victims, as Yonkers has the second highest number of Domestic Incident Reports (DIRs) in Westchester (2,499 out of 12,970 in 2010).

The proposed agreement will serve a public purpose by enhancing the safety and independence of abused women. If abused women are empowered to learn how to develop and maintain their own safety they are not as likely to return to dependence on their abusers, thereby reducing public safety costs and medical costs. If they are helped to become independent and self-sufficient they are not as likely to be dependent on public assistance.

The goals and objectives of the proposed agreement are for My Sisters' Place to provide:

- support services to 480 unduplicated victims, assistance to 1,200 hotline callers, and assistance in 1,200 cases through the CCAP
- legal assistance to 125 unduplicated victims in at least 350 cases

The goals and objectives of the proposed agreement will be tracked and monitored by the Office for Women, which will be responsible for monitoring My Sisters' Place's performance by means of site visits, as well as their monthly statistics and quarterly narratives.

The effectiveness of the CCAP will be determined by voluntary client surveys, which will be printed in English and Spanish upon the closing of cases. This will serve to assess the client's overall satisfaction of the services rendered as well as recommendations for improvements.

For example, in 2010 187 voluntary surveys reported that:

- 93% of clients know more ways to plan for their safety
- 90% of clients know more about community resources
- 94% of clients feel more comfortable asking for help
- 100% of clients were satisfied with the quality of services received

The effectiveness of legal services to victims will be determined by benefits received as a result of closed cases. Such benefits include: obtaining or maintaining custody of children; obtaining or preserving the right to visitation; obtaining a divorce, separation or annulment; obtaining an Order of Protection; and obtaining, preserving or increasing child support. The following are a few examples of benefits received as a result of 526 closed cases in 2010:

- 16 clients obtained or maintained custody of their children
- 7 clients obtained or preserved the right to visitation
- 11 clients obtained an Order of Protection
- 5 clients obtained, preserved, or increased child support

- 392 clients obtained advice and counsel on a family matter

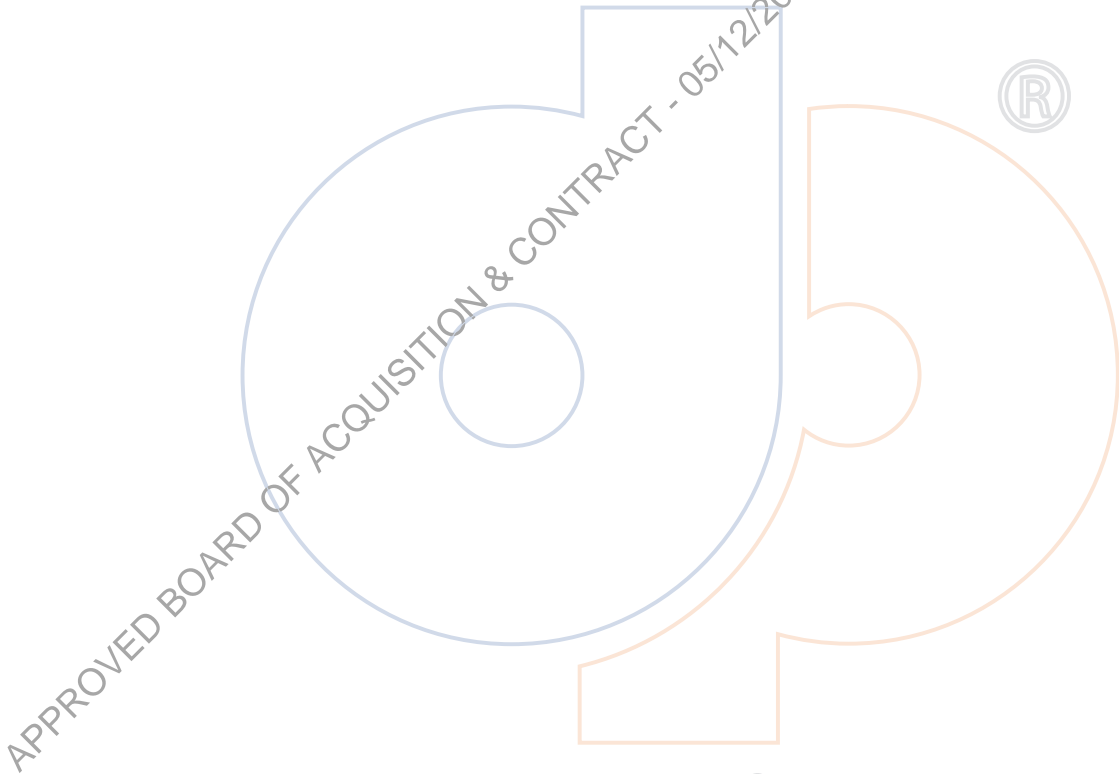
Further, Sections 3(a)(xvii), (xviii) and (xix) exempt the procurement of social services for those in need of public assistance, those in need of mental health or alcoholism treatment, and for the County's youth and the elderly. While all of the victims of domestic violence do not fall into these exemption categories, many of them do. The provision of social services to victims of domestic violence is not so substantially different from provision of services to the above named groups that it should not be similarly exempt, so as to give the County absolute discretion to choose those agencies that it believes are best suited to provide these services. Due to the fact that Yonkers reports nearly 20% of the County's DIRs, resulting in the need for legal services for domestic violence victims, and for the reasons set forth above, I ask that your Honorable Board make the determination that it is in the best interests of the County to exempt from the application of the procedural requirements of the Westchester County Procurement Policy an agreement with My Sisters' Place to provide non-residential domestic violence support services and legal services.

Accordingly, a resolution to exempt the procurement of non-residential domestic violence support services and legal services is hereby submitted for your Honorable Board's consideration.

# RESOLUTION

Upon a communication from the Coordinator of the Office for Women, be it hereby

**RESOLVED**, that pursuant to Section 3(a)(xxi) of the Westchester County Procurement Policy, it is hereby determined that application of the procedural requirements contained therein, including the necessity of soliciting written price quotations, is neither cost effective nor expedient, and accordingly, not in the best interests of the County in connection with the procurement of an agreement with My Sisters' Place, Inc. for the provision of various non-residential domestic violence services.



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