



JEB BUSH  
GOVERNOR

## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** AAA Directors **Notice #: 102505-2-I-LA**

**FROM:** Carole Green, Secretary

**DATE:** October 17, 2005

**SUBJECT:** Notice of Instruction: Request for assistance in the development of a statewide senior legal helpline

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The Department of Elder Affairs (department) is pleased to announce that the Administration on Aging (AOA) recently awarded funding to selected top applicants for Legal Assistance Grants, including Florida's Bay Area Legal Services. Bay Area is a Title III-B provider for PSAs Five and Six and currently operates a regional legal services hotline serving a five county area.

In partnership with the department, Bay Area will develop and manage a new *statewide senior legal helpline* to increase access to legal advice and referrals for underserved Florida Seniors. Bay Area will provide legal services in partnership with existing Title III-B legal services programs and other programs serving seniors within Florida, serving as a convenient point of entry for seniors who apply for legal assistance. Recognizing that there are many legal services providers successfully assisting Florida's seniors, Bay Area seeks to fill gaps in service and supplement existing services and will not take the place of programs that are sufficiently staffed to provide high quality legal services.

In order to achieve this goal, it is essential that a referral matrix be developed to identify existing providers and to outline those programs' availability to provide representation on different civil legal issues. The matrix will be a reference guide for helpline advocates, and callers will be referred back to their local providers when necessary to avoid duplication of services.

While services will be available statewide, the helpline toll-free number will initially be publicized in counties identified through the matrix as having the fewest legal programs available for their Senior residents and the greatest number of Seniors living in poverty. As helpline staffing capacity increases, more counties will be added until the toll-free number can be publicized statewide. By promoting the helpline gradually, Bay Area can develop the necessary partnerships, ensure sufficiency of resources and prevent lengthy waiting periods.

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We will all need to work together to ensure the success of this wonderful new benefit for Florida's seniors. Bay Area and the department seek the support and assistance of all area agencies on aging in achieving the major objectives of the new helpline, which are as follows: To create a partnership among Title III-B legal services providers statewide to determine priority legal issues for extended representation, to develop the statewide referral matrix, to identify underserved populations of seniors and to promote the helpline by disseminating materials. To assist us in this endeavor, we request the following:

- Please appoint a contact within your agency, perhaps your contract manager for the Title III-B legal services contracts, and ask them to contact Sarah Graham, Legal Services Developer, at the department by October 28<sup>th</sup>. She may be contacted by email at [grahamsk@elderaffairs.org](mailto:grahamsk@elderaffairs.org), or by phone at (850) 414-2000. This contact will ensure that your agency is notified of the toll-free phone number once the Helpline is set up to begin receiving calls, as well as new developments in the helpline's operation.
- Please ask the executive directors of your Title III-B legal services programs, or their designee within that program, to contact Mary Haberland, Helpline Project Manager, at Bay Area Legal Services by October 28. She may be contacted by e-mail at [mhaberland@bals.org](mailto:mhaberland@bals.org), or by phone at (813) 232-1222, ext. 114. This is necessary to facilitate development of the referral matrix being developed by Bay Area, a critical component of the project.

As we all know, legal problems are closely related to other social problems seniors face as they age, making it important that we work together to foster cooperative working relationships between social, medical and consumer support programs and legal service programs. Legal services are a priority service under the Older Americans Act and serve a vital role in the department's ability to meet its mission to provide choices and promote independence to older Floridians. We are excited about this opportunity to strengthen service to seniors, and we thank you for all you do to fulfill the mission of the department.