

Agenda Item Briefing  
Commissioners Court Meeting  
July 28, 2020  
AI-76468/ 10.C.

**AI Number:** 76468

**Commissioners Court Meeting Date:** July 28, 2020

**Information:** Requesting approval to create two Forensic Center Attendant positions in response to the COVID-19 public health emergency as reasonable and necessary expenses to assist with the functions of County Government, and County public health measures under the Cares Act Relief Fund for the period in which the County Covid-19 Emergency Declaration is in effect.

**Funding Source:** Cares Act Relief Fund

**Account No.** 0-1287-441-42-115-096-0-XXX

**Requested by:** Rosalinda Cantu on behalf of the Hidalgo County Forensics Center

**Department:** Hidalgo County Forensic Center

### **BACKGROUND**

With the passage and enactment of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) also known as the Third COVID-19 Supplemental Relief Bill on March 31, funds were made available to assist local governments in responding to the ongoing public health emergency.

Pursuant to Chapter 49, Inquests Upon Dead Bodies, Subchapter A, Duties Performed by Justices of the Peace of the Texas Code of Criminal Procedures, the Hidalgo County Forensic Center serves as the facility where (1) autopsies are performed by the County's contracted Pathologist, Dr. Norma Jean Farley, (2) descendants' bodies are stored until all post mortem procedures have been executed and (3) descendants bodies are stored as hold only. The current COVID-19 public health emergency is placing a tremendous strain on the County Forensics Center operations and personnel as the body count(s) have been increasing due to the increased deaths directly related to COVID-19. Therefore, additional personnel are direly needed to augment and/ or continue the same level of mandated County functions, including but not limited to autopsy services, and body storage. Among the main areas that require immediate attention are the following:

- receiving and logging in and out of descendants' bodies and property
- moving and storing descendants' bodies
- the coordinating of the transport of descendants' bodies between interested parties to include but not limited to hospitals, funeral homes, Justices of the Peace (JP's), state/ federal health agencies and the Hidalgo County Forensic Center, Office of Hidalgo County Emergency Management, transport companies and emergency response team(s).

The Hidalgo County Forensic Center hereby is seeking approval of the creation of two Forensic Center Attendant positions effective upon Commissioner's Court approval through grant end period, December 30, 2020.

**COMPLIANCE**

Approval of the item is consistent with Hidalgo County's intended purpose to address the responsibility set forth in Chapter 49, Inquests Upon Dead Bodies, Subchapter A, Duties Performed by Justices of the Peace of the Texas Code of Criminal Procedures. The goal is to provide efficient and effective delivery of services considering the increase of covid-19 cases resulting in deaths, the public's expectations, and the area's population and economy. Hidalgo County is taking the lead in responding to the COVID-19 health emergency for our community.

**AGENDA ITEM**

**CARES Act Relief Fund (1287):**

1. Discussion, consideration, and action to approve a necessary CARES Act Relief Fund expenditure to cover costs not accounted for in the current budget and cannot be lawfully funded by line item, allotment or allocation, for personnel costs to create two (2) Forensic Center Attendant positions to assist with County actions to facilitate compliance with public health measures addressing the ongoing COVID-19 public health emergency; the Court having reviewed the Agenda Item Briefing, herein finds that such expenditure is reasonable and necessary for the intended use.

2. Approval to create the following time-limited positions, effective upon Commissioner's Court approval (District Attorney's Office):

Action	Dept./ Prg.	Slot #	Position Title	Grade
Create	115-096	0031	Forensic Center Attendant	06
Create	115-096	0032	Forensic Center Attendant	06

3. Approval to revise the (CCP) Classified Positions List to include the new Forensic Center Attendant and COVID-19 Communications Coordinator positions.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

Ms. Rosalinda Cantu, Assistant Chief of Staff for the Hidalgo County Office of the Criminal District Attorney on behalf of the Hidalgo County Forensics Center recommends approval of the two time-limited positions to continue Hidalgo County's response to the ongoing COVID-19 public health emergency. Expenditures will be charged to the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Relief Grant Fund available to address the COVID-19 public health emergency.