



Memorandum No: 25-104

City Attorney's Office

To: Honorable Mayor, Vice Mayor and City Commissioners

From: D'Wayne M. Spence, Interim City Attorney

Date: September 8, 2025

Re: **City Attorney's Annual Report**

INTRODUCTION

On October 30, 2023, Thomas "Tom" Ansbro assumed the role of City Attorney for the City of Fort Lauderdale. During his tenure, Mr. Ansbro made significant strides in enhancing the culture and morale of the City Attorney's Office. His leadership was marked by strategic hiring, including a new legal office manager, three assistant city attorneys, paralegals, and legal assistants, as well as adjustments to staff positions and compensation. These efforts were instrumental in strengthening the office's capacity to serve the City effectively.

It is customary for the City Attorney to provide an annual report showcasing the outstanding work of the City Attorney's Office. Unfortunately, Mr. Ansbro's untimely passing, just eight days shy of completing his first year, prevented him from presenting this report. As we approach the anniversary of his passing, it is imperative to acknowledge the continued excellence of the office. The last time such a report was presented on behalf of the City Attorney's Office was in 2022.

While we anticipate the appointment of a new City Attorney, it is essential to highlight the remarkable achievements of the City Attorney's Office for the fiscal year 2024-2025. The dedication and expertise of our attorneys, paralegals, legal assistants, and our Law Office Manager are evident in the breadth and quality of legal and administrative services provided. This report underscores the indispensable role of the City Attorney's Office in delivering critical legal services at a cost unmatched by the private sector.

Our attorneys offer comprehensive legal expertise and counseling across a wide range of subject areas, serving as legal counsel to the City, its elected and appointed officials, boards, departments, and agencies. The staff effectively represents the City's

interests by minimizing liability and providing timely, cost-efficient, and high-quality legal advice and drafting assistance. These efforts support the operations of the City and advance the goals of the City Commission and City Management. Even in my capacity as the Interim City Attorney¹, I am proud of the office's accomplishments and its unwavering commitment to excellence.

The following is a short overview of some of the matters that the City Attorney's Office successfully and effectively handled, and continues to handle in some circumstances, through its in-house assistant city attorneys, support staff and appointed special counsel, from October 2024 through September 2025:

- Prepared and negotiated the new Ground Lease, Master Facilities Lease, and sublease for the International Swimming Hall of Fame Peninsula property.
- Prepared and negotiated the recognition agreement for the new sublease lease between the North Broward Hospital District and YMCA.
- Prepared and negotiated the new lease with the North Broward Hospital District for the "Dottie Mancini" park.
- Prepared and participated in the negotiation of a settlement agreement with Miami Beckham United, LLC.
- Currently defending the City in a lawsuit regarding the vacation of public rights-of-ways.
- Prepared and participated in the negotiation of a settlement agreement in the matter of the City of Fort Lauderdale, et al. v. Terminal Ventures, LLC, et al.
- Assisted and provided counsel, analysis, and procedural guidance with the receipt, processing, and evaluation of new unsolicited proposals submitted pursuant to Section 255.065, Fla.Stat.
- Interpreted and provided counsel and guidance regarding newly enacted legislation related to public camping and sleeping.

¹I was honored to be re-appointed as Interim City Attorney, effective October 30, 2024, pursuant to Resolution No. 24-233, adopted on November 7, 2024. Although I assumed leadership immediately following Mr. Ansbro's passing on October 22, 2024, this timing symbolically honored Mr. Ansbro with a full year of service posthumously.

- Assisted with the closing on Community Redevelopment Agency tax increment revenue loans.
- Assisted with the appointment, employment contract and transition of a new City Manager.
- Successfully defended at the United States District Court, Southern District of Florida, the matter of Purcell v. City of Fort Lauderdale, a lawsuit against the City and several of its police officers, asserting ten counts, including unlawful entry to their property (Fourth Amendment), excessive force (Fourth Amendment and common law), false imprisonment/arrest (Fourth Amendment and common law), and malicious prosecution by the officers.
- Assisted and participated in various labor negotiations.
- Provided prosecutorial services and other assistance essential to the current operation of the Community Court for the Seventeenth Judicial Circuit.
- Interpreted and provided counsel and guidance regarding Presidential and Gubernatorial executive orders affecting funding and operations.
- Prepared approximately **339 resolutions**.
- Prepared approximately **48 ordinances**.
- Prepared or reviewed over **644 contracts and agreements**, including revocable licenses, leases, and easements.
- Prepared and processed **11 land acquisitions**.
- Represented the City in **957 cases** before the Special Magistrate.
- Represented the City in **353 cases** before the Code Enforcement Board.
- Filed and prosecuted **391 municipal ordinance violation cases** in state court, of which 107 were adjudicated, 83 were nolle prossed, 3 were no informations, and 1 was withheld of adjudication.

- Reviewed and assigned counsel for **54 new civil litigation cases**; retained outside counsel for 28 of those cases, bringing the total of in-house cases to 26, while continuing to manage and monitor approximately 75 total civil cases pending in state and federal courts.
- Collected **\$75,000.00** in foreclosure and lien settlements and tri-party agreements.
- Collected **\$1,531.00** in foreclosure surplus funds.
- Collected **\$24,292.62** in Code violation releases.
- Collected **\$64,730.00** in forfeitures.
- Collected **\$57,434.50** in court costs, fines, diversionary fees, and community service buyouts.

CITY ATTORNEY'S OFFICE

ADMINISTRATION

Staff: D'Wayne M. Spence, Interim City Attorney
Angela Mozzott, Law Office Manager
Mayda Pineda, Senior Assistant to the City Attorney

As outlined in the City's Charter, the City Attorney is an executive officer of the City of Fort Lauderdale. In this role, I serve as the chief legal officer and advisor to the municipality and all its officers and employees regarding their official duties. I am also responsible for prosecuting violations of the City's Code of Ordinances. These responsibilities include:

- Advising the City Commission on all points of law and parliamentary procedures.
 - Preparing all ordinances and resolutions required by the City Commission.
 - Preparing and reviewing all contracts and other written instruments and endorse on each my approval of the form and correctness thereof.
 - Protecting and defending on behalf of the City all complaints, suits and controversies in which the City is a party, or when required to do so by the City Commission, filing any action on behalf of the City.

- Furnishing the City Commission or the City Manager, when requested to do so, my opinion on questions of law relating to any legal matter or to the powers, duties, obligations, or liability of any officer or employee of the City.
- Acting as the legal advisor to all city boards, committees and departments.
- Performing such other professional duties as may be required of me by the City Charter or by ordinance or resolution of the City Commission.

The City Attorney appoints a group of assistant city attorneys to aid in the delivery of aforementioned legal services and can also request the appointment of special counsel to assist in that effort. These attorneys and their professional legal support staff are equipped with a broad range of experience and specialization that are vital to the effective operation of the City Attorney's Office.

The City Attorney's Office is organized into four divisions: **(1) General Government and Transactional Services**; **(2) Police Legal Services**; **(3) City Prosecutor's Office**; and **(4) Litigation Division**. In addition to the City Attorney, the City Attorney's Office currently employs a total of 29 employees, consisting of the following personnel compliment: 3 Senior Assistant City Attorneys, 10 Assistant City Attorneys, 1 Senior Assistant to the City Attorney, 1 Law Office Manager, 7 Paralegals, 4 Senior Legal Assistants, and 2 Legal Assistants.

The City Attorney's total adopted budget was \$ 7,805,577 for fiscal year 2025, and our proposed budget for fiscal year 2026 is \$ 8,391,922, which captures an increase in health insurance benefit expenses due to rate increase, additional participation and an increase in office space rent at the 1 East Broward building.

GENERAL GOVERNMENT AND TRANSACTIONAL SERVICES

Staff: Eric Abend, Senior Assistant City Attorney
Paul Bangel, Senior Assistant City Attorney
Rhonda Hasan, Senior Assistant City Attorney
Shaun Armarnani, Assistant City Attorney
Gabrielle Bush, Assistant City Attorney
Robert Dunckel, Assistant City Attorney
Kimberly Mosley, Assistant City Attorney
Patricia SaintVil-Joseph, Assistant City Attorney
Lynn Solomon, Assistant City Attorney

Glynis Burney, Paralegal
Jolene Chism, Paralegal
Erica Keiper, Paralegal
Jennifer Larregui, Paralegal
Sonia Sierra, Paralegal
Stephanie Souza, Senior Legal Assistant

The General Government section of our practice involves preparing numerous ordinances and resolutions, both proactively and in response to requests, to establish the policies and goals of the City Commission and City Management. Last fiscal year, we drafted **approximately 48 ordinances and 339 resolutions**. A significant amount of time is also dedicated to responding to inquiries from various city departments. Each business day, our office addresses a wide range of legal issues and requests, some specific to departmental functions or individual employees, and others related to general government operations. We also review rules, regulations, and standard operating procedures for departments like the Fort Lauderdale Fire-Rescue and Police Departments, aiding in their accreditation.

The transactional aspect of our practice applies legal principles to the City's business transactions. This includes contracts, agreements, purchase orders, change orders, easements, revocable licenses, employment agreements, real estate agreements, and other legal instruments. Our office negotiates, reviews, and drafts numerous legal documents for city departments. Last fiscal year, we **drafted or reviewed over 644 contracts, agreements, easements, leases, and revocable licenses**, ensuring these legal instruments protect the City's interests when public funds are expended.

Additionally, our office addresses questions from the City Commission, departments, employees, and advisory board members regarding standards of conduct for public officers and employees under Florida Statutes Chapter 112. These issues often involve employment conditions, travel expenses, retirement, pensions, voting conflicts, and disclosure of financial interests and gifts. Legal opinions are prepared in response to these inquiries, in accordance with Broward County ordinances.

We also collaborate with the City Clerk's Office to review public record requests for records designated as "exempt" or "confidential." Florida Public Records Law ensures public access to records, while protecting confidential information under Florida Statutes. The Government-in-the-Sunshine Law complements this by ensuring government openness. Our office advises on Sunshine Law issues, including open

meetings, meeting notices, and closed-door sessions for labor negotiations and litigation. We provide training for City Commissioners on Sunshine Law and public records law to meet state and county requirements.

A critical aspect of managing the City Attorney's Office is engaging with citizens. We respond to inquiries from the City Commission and City Manager's Office on citizen-related issues, recognizing the vital role citizens play in municipal government. We strive for timely resolutions, often requiring extensive legal research. Our responses may include correspondence, legal opinions, telephone conferences, or in-person meetings with myself or my staff.

POLICE LEGAL SERVICES

Staff: Julie Steinhardt, Assistant City Attorney, Police Legal Advisor
Haydee Martinez, Paralegal
Stephanie Striggles-Lane, Senior Legal Assistant

Our office maintains a dedicated full-time team at the police department, including an attorney, paralegal, and senior legal assistant, to address the wide range of legal issues law enforcement encounters daily. The Police Legal Advisor plays a crucial role in fostering cooperation and open communication between the City Attorney's Office and the Fort Lauderdale Police Department. Together with the Police Legal Advisor, I collaborate closely with the Police Chief and command staff to ensure the effective resolution of legal issues and to provide the City's police officers with the legal information they need to perform their duties lawfully and professionally.

In the last fiscal year, the Police Legal Services processed and handled **11 seized vehicles, resulting in \$3,428.68 in revenue, 2 seizures of assets in collaboration with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives totaling \$375,400.00 in assets, 80% due to the city, 2 pre-litigation settlements in the amount of \$56,440.00, reviewed over 23 police-related contracts and Memoranda of Understanding, 12 motions for return of property, and 2 animal cruelty cases.** Furthermore, in accordance with the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Act, the Police Legal Advisor prepared, filed, and prosecuted **22 Risk Protection Orders** this last fiscal year.

The advisory functions of this office include the following:

- Review and revise FLPD policies and standard operating procedures.
- Provide annual training on 4th, 5th, and 6th Amendment issues, Rachel's Law, Marsy's Law, and all other laws pertinent to criminal procedure and evidentiary matters.

- Provide legal advice concerning state and federal statutes and municipal ordinances as they relate to law enforcement issues.
- Consult with Internal Affairs, Special Investigations Division, Detective Bureau and other specialized police units.
- Serve as Legal Advisor to the Chief of Police concerning Departmental policies and legal issues.
- Available on 24-hour basis for Police emergency situations.
- Meet with police administration on a regular basis to discuss contracts and agreements, police programs, employee issues, ordinance drafting, ordinance interpretation, and ordinance enforcement.
- Consult with municipal prosecutors on law enforcement issues and municipal criminal prosecutions.
- Research and complete numerous assignments affecting the department - completion could be preparation of a letter, preparation of a legal opinion, conducting research, preparation or negotiation of an agreement, or acquisition of information.
- Attend conferences and consult with police administrators and officers concerning action plans and on-going police operations.
- Police liaison to the State Attorney's Office, the Broward County Office of the Inspector General and other local, state and federal law enforcement agencies.
- Assist the department in disposing of unclaimed, lost, and/or abandoned property, in accordance with Florida Statutes, Chapter 705.
- Prepare and review law enforcement related ordinances.
- Prepare and review contracts, interlocal agreements, task force agreements, mutual aid agreements, grant agreements, leases and license agreements concerning police department activities.
- Acts as liaison to the State Attorney's Office and petitions the court for authorization for evidence destruction, thereby assisting the police evidence unit in purging evidence related to closed investigations and prosecutions.

The litigation functions of this office include the following:

- Litigate Rule to Show Cause motions directed at police officers.
- Litigate motions to quash subpoenas.
- Litigate all forfeiture cases at the trial and appellate levels, prepare necessary pleadings and notices, represent City at court hearings, depositions and trials.
- Litigate all police-related public records matters at the trial and appellate levels, prepare necessary pleadings and notices, attend court hearings, depositions and trials.
- Litigate all cases to recover property held by the Police.

CITY PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE

Staff: Dina Kaizen, Assistant City Attorney, Municipal Prosecutor
Donald Londeree, Assistant City Attorney, Municipal Prosecutor
Priya Sooknanan, Senior Legal Assistant
Monica Roman, Legal Assistant
Ellen O'Connor, Legal Assistant

The City Prosecutor is responsible for the prosecution of all criminal violations of the City's code of ordinances. The number of cases presented to our office by the Fort Lauderdale Police Department determines our workload. When cases are presented to the City prosecutor for filing, each case is reviewed, and a determination is made as to whether to prosecute the case. There are generally four ways a case is disposed of; by plea agreement, *nolle prossed*, verdict at trial, or dismissal.

In the period from October 2024 through the date of this memorandum, the City Prosecutor's Office **filed 391 new cases** and **declined to file 3 cases**. In the same period of time, **83 pending cases were *nolle prossed*** mostly due to the completion of diversion programs, **107 were adjudicated**, and **1 case resulting in a withhold of adjudication**. No cases proceeded to trial. The monetary disposition for this fiscal year was as follows:

Court Costs and Fines:	\$35,484.00
Misc/Community	
Service Buyout &	\$21,950.50

City Diversion Fees: \$49,985.00

TOTAL RECOVERY FOR CITY: \$57,434.50

The City Prosecutor's Office's responsibilities include:

- Provide legal advice to police officers in municipal investigations.
- Review and make filing decisions on all municipal ordinance arrests.
- Review case filing and intake from citizens and victims requesting municipal cases to be filed on alleged violations of the law not occurring in a police officer's presence.
- Represent the City before all Magistrate Judges at all first appearance hearings on municipal ordinance arrests.
- Represent the City in all County Court arraignments on all City prosecutions.
- Represent the City at all Calendar Call hearings and plea negotiations.
- Serve as the prosecuting trial attorney for all criminal prosecutions in County Court on cases filed by the City.
- Represent the City on all municipal criminal appeals.
- Represent the City at all Veterans Court proceedings.
- Represent the City on all municipal violations of probation hearings.
- Seek to recover costs of prosecutions through jail-time sentences, fines, court costs, bond estreatures and community service buyouts.
- Recover restitution on behalf of victims in municipal prosecutions.
- Assist in regulating and ensuring compliance in community service work program.
- Represent the City at Mental Health Court proceedings.
- Represent the City at all misdemeanor drug court proceedings.

- Meet with witnesses; prepare for and represent the City on all prosecutions before the Nuisance Abatement Board, including appeals.
- Responsible for all lien filings in cases of non-compliance with Nuisance Abatement Board orders.

Notably, the City Prosecutors have been an integral component of the operation of Seventeenth Judicial Circuit's Community Court, held at City Hall once a week. As you are aware, this court acts as a diversionary program to provide needed wrap-around social services to persons in need of social services, including the City's homeless, while at the same time providing a more compassionate level of accountability for the violation of various laws the defendants have committed. In addition to assisting in the operation of the Community Court, a city prosecutor has represented the City in **391 new cases** therein this year.

LITIGATION DIVISION

Staff: Rhonda Hasan, Senior Assistant City Attorney
Robert Oldershaw, Assistant City Attorney, Chief Litigation Counsel
Glynis Burney, Paralegal
Jolene Chism, Paralegal
Jacqueline Gonzalez, Paralegal
Meralis Celetti, Senior Legal Assistant

The Litigation Division of the City Attorney's Office processes and handles numerous civil proceedings, including state and federal lawsuits, foreclosures, code enforcement cases, bankruptcy, garnishments, and probate. With the large number of services provided to our residents, the numerous agreements and contracts entered into, and ordinances to enforce, including building and quality of life codes, the City is often involved in litigation, either defensively or proactively. Our office, either through our in-house attorneys or through special counsel, represents the City in civil court and administrative actions, including appeals, and special magistrate and code enforcement board proceedings. The types of civil actions involving the City typically include, but are not limited to, matters pertaining to slip and falls, vehicle accidents, professional police liability, breach of contracts and leases, foreclosures, code enforcement, declaratory actions, and extraordinary writs (usually land use related). The Litigation Division also offer counseling and deposition and trial testimony preparation services for employees who have been subpoenaed for testimony in criminal or civil cases.

From October 2024 through the date of this memorandum, our office reviewed and assigned counsel for **54 new civil litigation cases**, and **retained 26** of those cases

in-house, while continuing to manage and monitor approximately **40 total pending civil cases**. Additional accomplishments of the Litigation Division are as follows:

- Represented the City in **2,006 Special Magistrate hearings**.
- Represented the City in **353 Code Enforcement Board hearings**.
- Represented the City in **23 bankruptcy cases**
- Processed **16 garnishment cases** and requests.
- Represented the City in **13 probate cases**.
- Represented the City in **31 foreclosure cases**, resulting in lien settlements of **\$24,292.62 and \$1,531.96** in foreclosure surplus.
- Total collections on **Probate Statements of Claims filed: \$34,906.12**.
- Total collections on **Bankruptcy Proofs of Claim filed: \$2,943.35**.

In addition to the work of the Litigation Division, due to the volume of lawsuits filed against the City, special outside counsel are appointed by the City Commission pursuant to the City Charter and are assigned various litigation matters by the City Attorney. Notwithstanding, special outside counsel consulted with me regarding key litigation strategies. We have endeavored to retain the best attorneys and law firms for the subject matters and practice areas at issue in each case, but also at the best value. The cases assigned and the fees and costs expended on each case are monitored by our office and Risk Management and are reported to the City Commission via the Litigation Report.

CONCLUSION

I trust this report provides a comprehensive overview of our office's legal services and practice areas. It highlights the volume and diversity of issues we addressed in the last fiscal year. As you review it, you will collectively recognize the deliberate and efficient use of resources aligned with our shared priorities while managing the challenge of unexpected loss with efficiency and care. Despite these hurdles, we continue to deliver timely and high-quality legal work, a testament to the dedication of our team, which I am proud to have led this past year.

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C: Rickelle Williams, City Manager
David R. Soloman, City Clerk
Patrick Reilly, City Auditor
City Attorney's Office