

# SELECTING OFFICIAL NEWSPAPER OF THE RENT PROGRAM/RENT BOARD

Item G-6

Nicolas Traylor-Executive Director

CITY OF RICHMOND RENT PROGRAM

---

November 20, 2024



## STATEMENT OF THE ISSUE

Each year, before July 1st, the Board is mandated to conduct a public hearing on the proposed budget and formally adopt an annual budget for the upcoming fiscal year. No later than 35 days before the fiscal year begins, the Executive Director must present the proposed budget to the Board. Following a thorough review and any necessary revisions, the Board schedules the public hearing and ensure that a notice is published in the official newspaper at least 10 days prior to the hearing.

The issue before the Rent Board is to identify and select the official newspaper for publishing Rent Board public hearings as required by the Fair Rent, Just Cause for Eviction and Homeowner Protection Ordinance.

Both the City of Richmond and the Richmond Rent Program currently utilize the West County Times as the newspaper for publishing notices of public hearings for adoption of their respective annual budgets and legal notices. At the May 15, 2024, Regular Meeting of the Rent Board, the Board directed staff to create a Note to Reader section of the Rent Board Regulations following the Table of Contents and to compose appropriate language to identify the Official Newspaper of the Rent Board.

## FISCAL IMPACT

- There is no fiscal impact related to this item.

## BACKGROUND

- Richmond Municipal Code requires that the Board hold a public hearing on the proposed budget for formal adoption. The Rent Ordinance also requires that the budget hearing be noticed in “the official newspaper”. There is no definition of “the official newspaper” listed in the Rent Ordinance.
- It is a legal requirement under the Rent Ordinance to notice the public regarding the proposed annual Rent Program budget and other public hearings and legal notices. This legal requirement is in place to ensure the public is noticed with the opportunity and ability to provide feedback and comment on the Rent Program’s budget.
- Identifying an official newspaper will provide the community a direct source to locate public hearings and legal notices from the Rent Program/Rent Board. Having an established official newspaper will save the public time. The members of the public will no longer need to search through multiple periodicals or various media sources to find published items.

## PURPOSE

- The drafters of the Rent Ordinance presumably left this definition to be vague to allow the Board and/or staff to choose which newspaper would best suit its needs to reach the broadest possible audience of Richmond Landlords, Tenants and representatives thereof.
- During the Rent Program's first budget cycle in fiscal year 2017-18, in line with the City of Richmond's practice, Rent Program executive staff elected to use the West County Times as the newspaper for publishing the notice of the annual budget public hearing.

## IDENTIFYING THE OFFICIAL NEWSPAPER OF THE RICHMOND RENT PROGRAM/RENT BOARD

- Neither the City of Richmond or the Rent Program have officially identified a newspaper as its “official” publication. Municipal Code has no language requiring the City to make such a designation. The decision to utilize a particular newspaper is left for City Management to decide. Giving the City Manager the ability to designate the official newspaper provides for flexibility to pivot and redesignate which newspaper to use in the case that the official newspaper goes defunct around the time the City is required to provide public notice, if the turnaround time for publishing changes significantly due to unforeseen circumstances, or another better alternative newspaper arises that can better reach Richmond during a crucial noticing period.
- The Rent Ordinance explicitly states that the Rent Board will publish notices in “the Official Newspaper”. Thus, the Board is tasked with selecting a newspaper. Staff recommend however, that the Board approve language giving the Executive Director ability to redesignate the official newspaper in cases where a quick pivot is necessary to meet legal deadlines.
- The City of Richmond has historically used the West County Times as the newspaper it uses to notice public hearing notices. According to the City Clerks’ Office, the West County Times was chosen as it is the local (regional) newspaper with the largest circulation in the Richmond.
- The Board is not required to utilize the West County Times, simply because it has the largest circulation. However, while approximately 27% of Richmond Landlords live in Richmond, about 88% of Richmond Landlords live in the surrounding Bay Area. Thus, using a local newspaper that only circulates in Richmond or certain neighborhoods in Richmond, would fail to reach as many Richmond Landlords as it would Richmond Tenants.

PROPOSED LANGUAGE IDENTIFYING THE OFFICIAL  
NEWSPAPER OF THE RICHMOND RENT PROGRAM/RENT  
BOARD

- The Official Newspaper will be identified in the Note to Reader Section of the Rent Board Regulation Table of Contents and would read as follows:

*“The West County Times is designated as the official newspaper of the Rent Board for publishing notices of public hearings and legal notices, unless specified otherwise by the Executive Director.”*

## RECOMMENDED ACTION

Add to the Note to Reader Section of the Rent Board Regulations following the Table of Contents and appropriate language in that section that: The West County Times is designated as the official newspaper for publishing notices of public hearings and legal notices, unless specified otherwise by the Executive Director.

# Contract with Project Sentinel to Provide Legal Services for Richmond Landlords and Tenants

NICOLAS TRAYLOR-EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

RICHMOND RENT PROGRAM

ITEM I-1

NOVEMBER 20, 2024

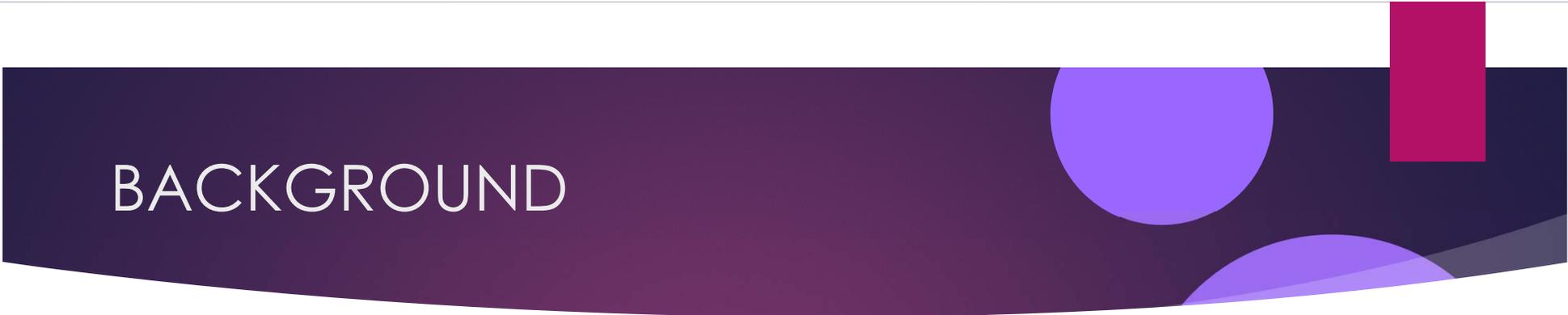


# STATEMENT OF THE ISSUE

- ▶ At its June 26, 2023, Special Meeting, the Richmond Rent Board approved \$75,000 to fund legal services for Richmond landlords and tenants. The funding aims to address issues where small property owners improperly attempt to terminate tenancies without legal guidance, leading to harassment claims, illegal evictions, and financial instability for both landlords and tenants.
- ▶ After the contract with Bay Area Legal Aid ended in June 2023, the Rent Program faced a gap in legal services. A Request for Proposals in November 2023 yielded no bids, prompting the program to negotiate with Project Sentinel. A contract to provide an attorney for up to 20 hours a week, would offer four service activities: legal advice, written legal services, negotiation and settlement, and access to additional resources.

## FISCAL IMPACT

- ▶ The proposed contract will not exceed \$75,000 per fiscal year. Since the contract would commence after July 1, funding shall be prorated from the time the contract begins until the end of the fiscal year.



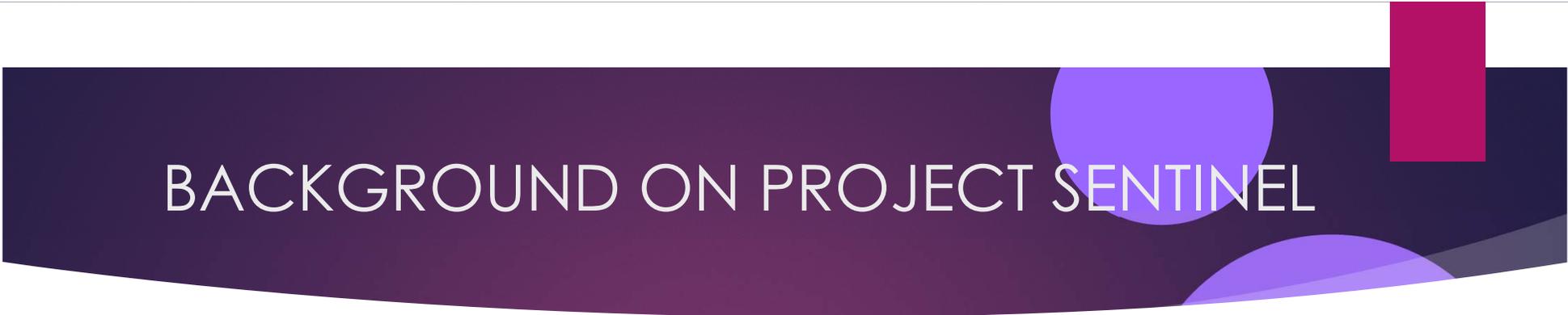
# BACKGROUND

- ▶ At the May 15, 2023, Regular Meeting of the Rent Board, Executive Director Nicolas Traylor highlighted providing legal services to Richmond landlords and tenants as a key "Program Development" goal for the 2023-24 fiscal year. This proposal had been considered in previous years after Richmond landlords, particularly small property owners who make up about 88% of landlords in the city, expressed a need for legal support to better enforce and comply with the Richmond Rent Ordinance.



## PROPOSED LANDLORD/TENANT LEGAL SERVICES PROGRAM ALIGNS WITH THE RICHMOND RENT ORDINANCE

- ▶ The Richmond Rent Ordinance aims to promote neighborhood stability, healthy housing, and affordability by regulating landlord-tenant matters related to rents and evictions, while ensuring landlords' right to a fair return. Effective enforcement of the ordinance requires landlords who understand and follow its requirements. Providing legal services to both landlords and tenants, including legal advice, helps prevent violations and costly mistakes arising from uninformed decision-making.



# BACKGROUND ON PROJECT SENTINEL

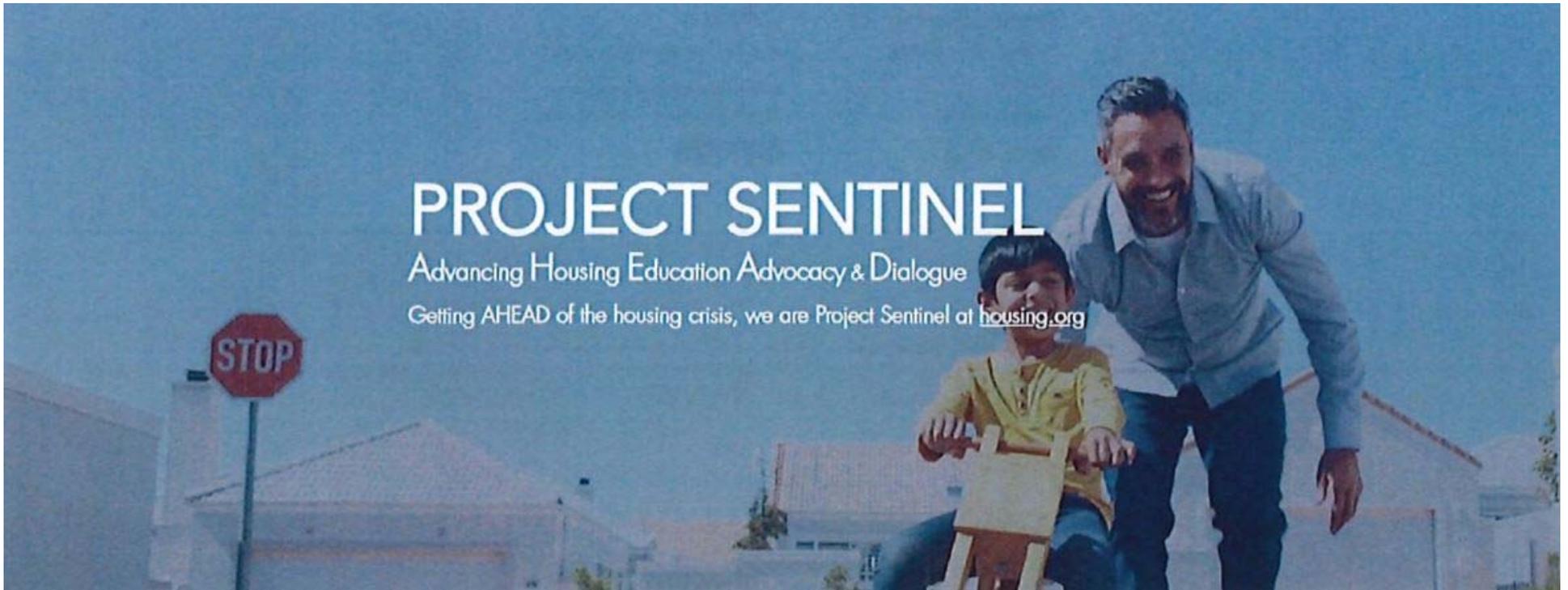
- ▶ Project Sentinel, a nonprofit based in Santa Clara, California, promotes fair housing and resolves housing-related disputes. Its mission is to prevent housing discrimination and ensure compliance with fair housing laws by educating tenants and landlords on their rights and responsibilities.
- ▶ Operating across Northern California, particularly the San Francisco Bay Area, Project Sentinel serves cities such as Santa Clara, San José, Mountain View, Palo Alto, Fremont, and others. The organization collaborates with jurisdictions with rent control and just-cause eviction ordinances, offering services like mediation, dispute resolution, and legal and public information support for landlords and tenants.

# SCOPE OF SERVICES

## PROJECT SENTINEL

Advancing Housing Education Advocacy & Dialogue

Getting AHEAD of the housing crisis, we are Project Sentinel at [housing.org](https://housing.org)





## Activity No. 1- Legal Advice and Consultation

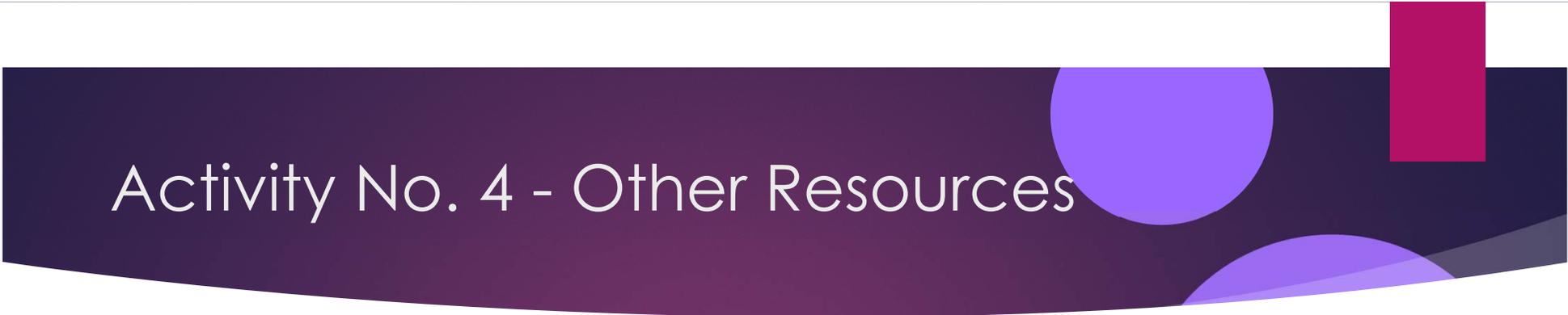
- ▶ The contractor will provide consultations, legal advice, and advocacy on issues related to the Richmond Rent Ordinance, which regulates landlord-tenant matters such as rents, evictions, habitability, security deposits, and relocation while ensuring landlords' right to a fair return.
- ▶ They will also advise eligible participants on Notices of Termination and Unlawful Detainers, including statutory requirements, the legal process, and proof needed in such cases. While the contractor may assess the strength of a notice or aid in court preparation, these services are not mandatory.

## Activity No. 2 - Written Legal Services

- ▶ The contractor will provide letter-writing services for eligible participants to communicate rights and obligations under the Rent Ordinance and related laws. These letters will include factual summaries and accurate legal citations but will not require responses to any replies received. The contractor must avoid conflicts of interest.
- ▶ Additionally, the contractor will assist in preparing and reviewing Rent Board-required documents, such as petitions, rent increase notices, and registration forms. Assisting with Maintenance of Net Operating Income (MNOI) application will be discretionary depending on bandwidth.

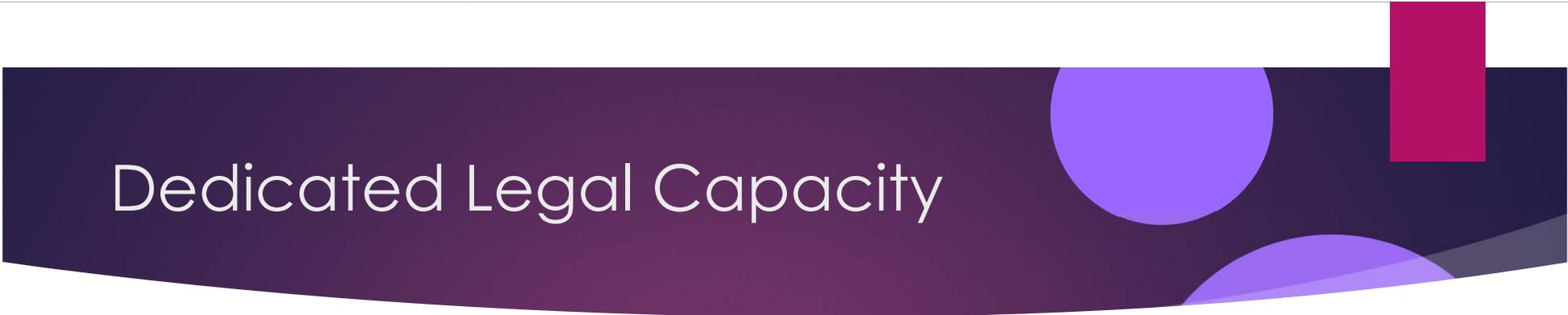
## Activity No. 3 - Negotiation and Settlement

- ▶ The contractor may mediate cases referred by the Rent Program, with each mediation limited to four hours. If necessary, the contractor may request up to an additional four hours, but unresolved mediations beyond eight hours will be terminated. Before concluding, the contractor must inform parties of their rights under the Rent Board's administrative process.
- ▶ The contractor is prohibited from mediating cases involving eviction notices, relocation payments below required levels, Maximum Allowable Rent without approval, agreements leading to permanent tenant relocation, subtenant/master-tenant conflicts without landlord involvement, or when either party has legal representation.



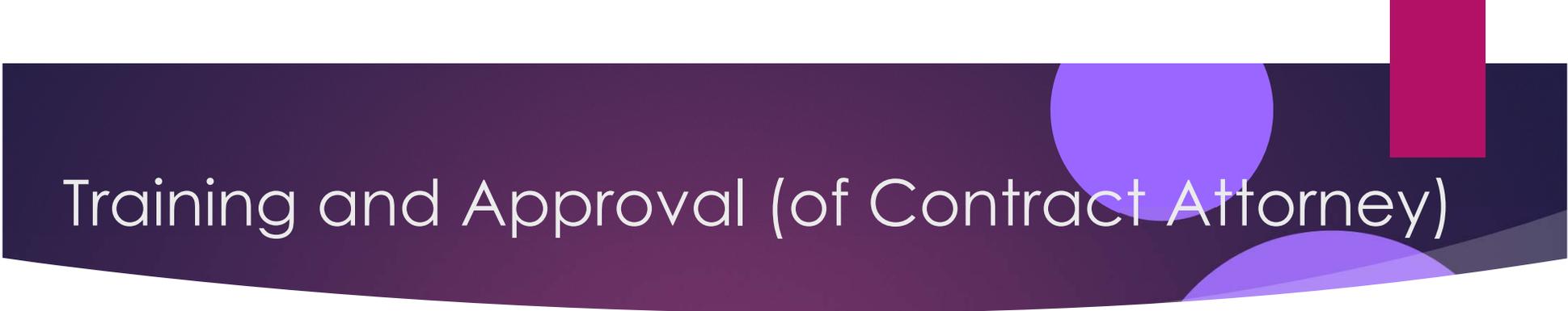
## Activity No. 4 - Other Resources

- ▶ The contractor may provide referrals to participants needing additional or specialized resources. This includes directing them to legal aid organizations, pro bono services, or private law firms and attorneys.



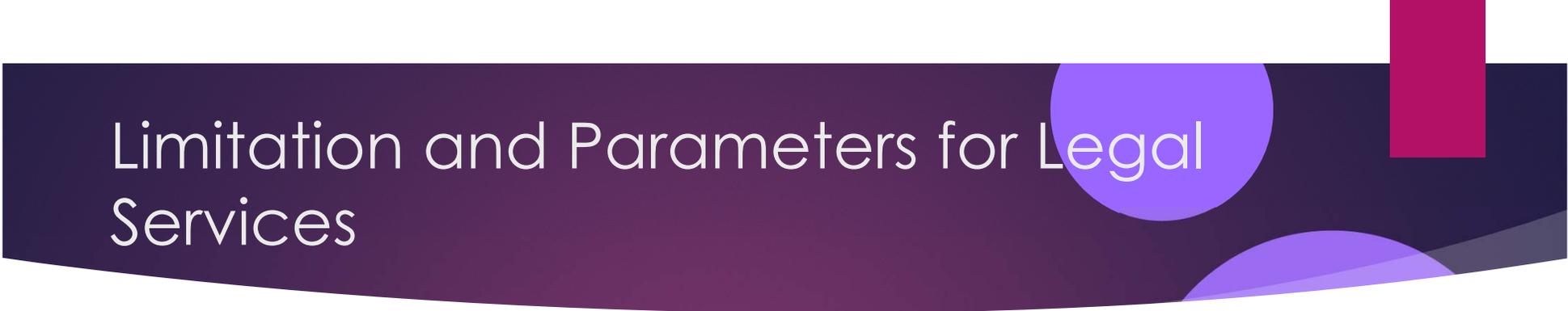
## Dedicated Legal Capacity

The contractor will provide an attorney working approximately 20 hours per week (0.5 FTE) to handle Richmond cases and serve eligible participants under this agreement.



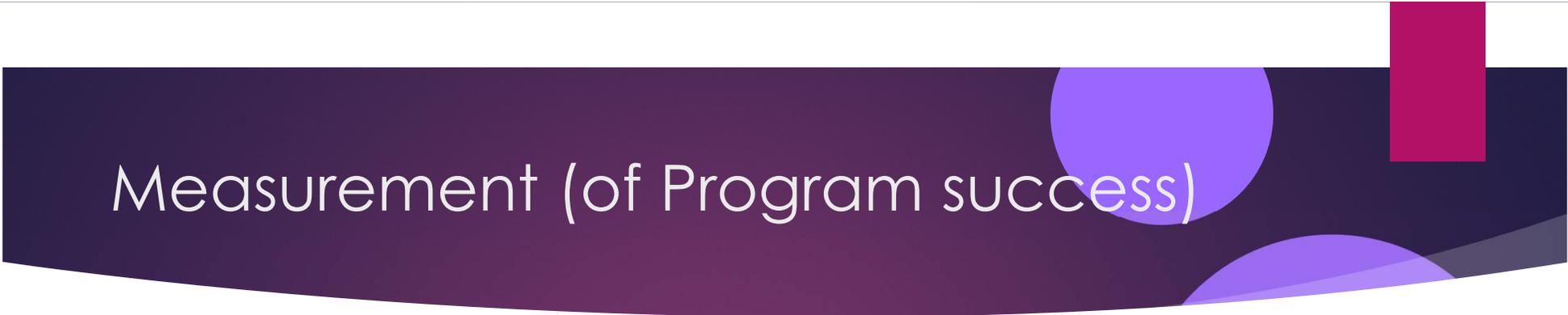
## Training and Approval (of Contract Attorney)

- ▶ Before starting services, the attorney must be interviewed by Rent Program Legal Staff to verify qualifications and experience. The attorney must also complete an initial training program covering Rent Program services, the Rent Ordinance, and Rent Board regulations. Additional training may be required as needed.



# Limitation and Parameters for Legal Services

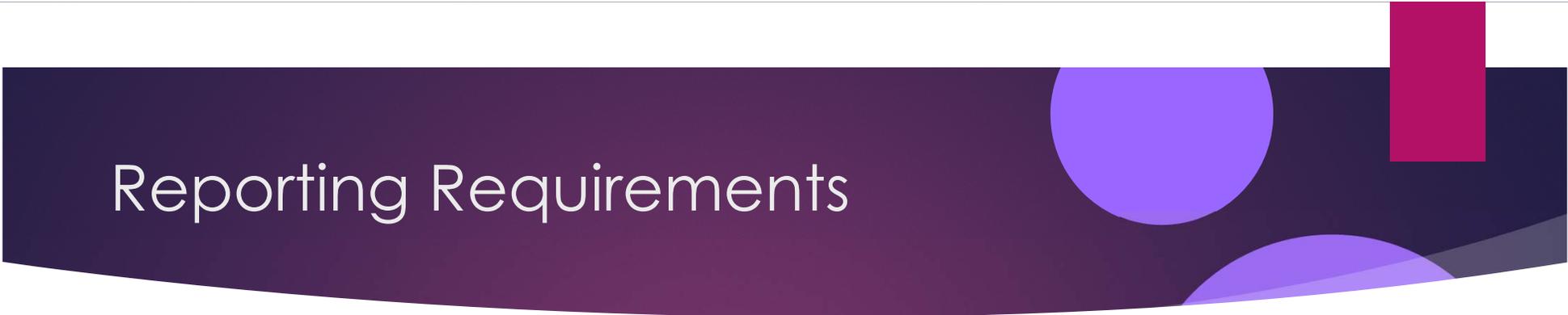
1. **Appointment and Referral:** Services are appointment-based and require a referral from Rent Program staff.
2. **Waiver Requirement:** Participants must sign a waiver, approved by the Executive Director, acknowledging the attorney provides limited services, not ongoing representation. The waiver is part of the intake process.
3. **Session Limits:** Sessions are capped at 45 minutes but can be extended at the attorney's discretion.
4. **Session Frequency:** Participants are typically limited to two sessions per month, with additional sessions allowed at the attorney's discretion.
5. **Equitable Access:** The attorney must ensure fair and equitable service, avoiding monopolization of time by any participant.
6. **Conflict of Interest:** Attorneys must avoid conflicts of interest when providing services.
7. **Service Termination:** Attorneys may end a session or discontinue service for reasonable cause.



# Measurement (of Program success)

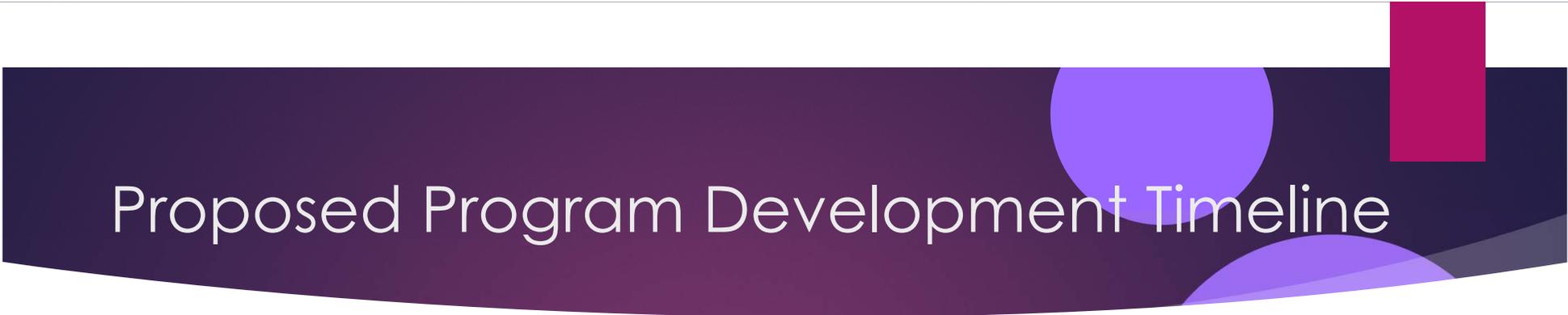
The contractor must provide detailed reporting on the following:

- 1.Participant Numbers:** Total number of participants served, including repeat participants.
- 2.Legal Issues and Outcomes:** Categories of legal issues addressed, services provided, and known outcomes.
- 3.Service Duration:** Approximate time spent on each service.
- 4.Property Details:** Type of property involved (e.g., single-family home, multi-unit) and its rent control status.
- 5.Participant Data:** Information for each participant, including their role (landlord, tenant, advocate), address, optional demographic data (e.g., race/ethnicity), language or accessibility needs, income and source, household size (for tenants), monthly rent, security deposit details, rent payment history, notice type received, housing issue description, and client goals. Reports must redact identifying details to maintain confidentiality.
- 6.Verification:** The Rent Program may dispute reported hours and request additional documentation if the hours appear unreasonable or non-compliant with contract goals.



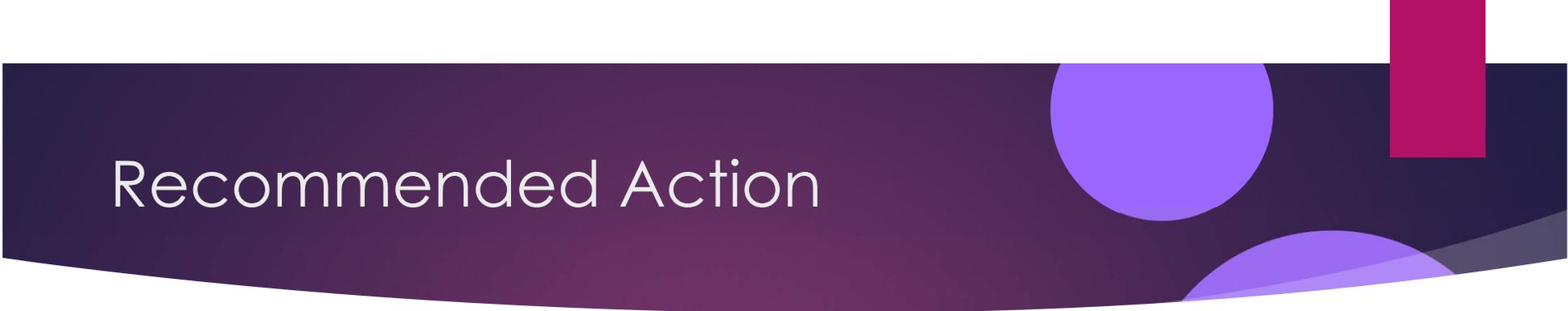
# Reporting Requirements

1. **Monthly Reports:** The contractor must submit monthly reports with invoices, detailing the number of participants served, property or tenancy data, demographics (e.g., race/ethnicity), activities performed, and legal issues addressed. Client names and addresses must be redacted to protect confidentiality, with full records available for review if needed.
2. **Quarterly Meetings:** The attorney must meet with Rent Program staff at least quarterly to review program progress, with additional meetings scheduled as required by the Executive Director.
3. **Annual Presentation:** Upon request, the contractor must present annually to the Richmond Rent Board before contract renewal, summarizing services provided and addressing board questions



# Proposed Program Development Timeline

- ▶ Upon approval by the Board, the Landlord/Tenant Legal Services Program is anticipated to start in January of 2025. Before legal services can be provided, the Rent Program requires approximately 4-6 weeks for training, creation of internal processes and procedures, developing forms, and completing other essential start-up tasks.



## Recommended Action

- ▶ **APPROVE** a contract, not to exceed \$75,000 with Project Sentinel to provide legal services to Richmond Landlords and Tenants for Fiscal Year 2024-25.

# Contract with Accent on Languages for Interpretation Services

November 20, 2024

Nicolas Traylor-Executive Director

Richmond Rent Program

Item I-2



# Statement of the Issue

- In July 2024, staff members issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) for interpretation services with an emphasis on in-person interpretation to be utilized by the Richmond Rent Board. In August of 2024, in accordance with the City's procurement policies, the Rent Program selected Accent on Languages to provide interpretation services to the agency through June 30, 2025, with a payment limit not to exceed \$26,200. Staff members are requesting Rent Board approval for a contract to provide interpretation services through June 30, 2025.



# Fiscal Impact

- The fiscal impact will not exceed \$26,200 in Fiscal Year 2024-25. Staff members awarded Accent on Languages the contract to provide interpretation services.

# Background

- On June 28, 2024, the Richmond Rent Board adopted the Fiscal Year 2024-25 Rent Program budget which allocated \$26,200 for interpretation services with an emphasis on reliable in-person interpretation for Rent Board meetings.
- In July 2025, staff members issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) for interpretation services to be utilized by the Rent Board and Rent Program for its meetings and hearings. In August 2024, Accent on Languages, a Berkeley based firm was selected out of 3 bidders.

# Background on Accent on Languages



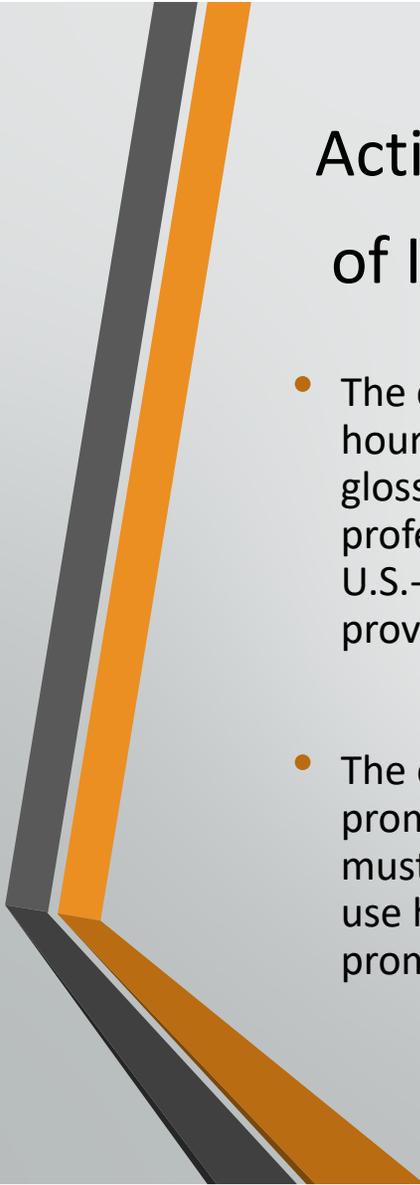
- As described on its website:

*“**Accent on Languages** is a minority, and women owned small business specializing in catering to each clients’ unique needs for languages and culture. Being in the industry for more than 30 years, we offer world-class translation, interpreting/interpretation, localization, transcription, language assessment, and many other language related services.”*

- Accent on Languages’ primary focus is working with officials at the city, county, state and federal levels, translating over 120 languages, and with over 150 government contracts with successful completion.
- Staff members are requesting Rent Board approval of a contract term to be prorated during the initial term from the date of the execution of the contract through June 30, 2025.
- Accent on Languages will provide certified, accredited interpreters accessible onsite, by telephone or video conference as requested by Rent Program staff. Their focus will be to provide in-person interpretation services for Rent Board meetings. If the budget permits, interpretation for Hearings, Community Workshops, Counseling sessions or similar events may be provided.



# Scope of Services



## Activity No. 1: Maintenance and Evaluation of Interpreters

- The contractor must provide interpreters who have completed nationally-accredited 40+ hour training and earn six continuing education credits annually. Interpreters must study glossaries related to Rent Board regulations, ordinances, and procedures, and be briefed on professional conduct. The contractor will maintain a list of Rent Board-approved, certified U.S.-based interpreters, removing any interpreter who receives negative feedback and providing qualified replacements.
- The contractor will monitor interpreter performance through regular reviews and respond promptly to grievances or issues raised by Rent Board staff. Reliable in-person interpreters must be available for Rent Board meetings and events, with remote interpreters required to use high-speed, noise-free setups. The contractor must address technical disruptions promptly and provide immediate support via phone when needed.

## Activity No. 2: Scheduling of Interpretation

- Rent Board staff will request interpretation services by contacting the contractor with session details, including date, time, location or platform, language, and job specifics. The contractor will confirm scheduling via email at least 24 hours in advance, providing necessary connection information for remote sessions. Services are available for evening and weekend events.
- Onsite interpreters will arrive 15 minutes early, and remote interpreters will log in 5 minutes prior. Interpreters will provide simultaneous or continuous interpretation, maintaining neutrality. The contractor will record session end times for billing and document feedback from Rent Board staff to guide future preferences or improvements.

## Activity No. 3: Interpretation for Petition Hearings

- The contractor will provide U.S.-based, certified interpreters for onsite, phone, or videoconference participation in Rent Board Petition Hearings, typically held on Tuesdays and Thursdays at 10:00 a.m. PDT. For teleconferences, interpreters must join the provided conference line using an access code at least five minutes before the hearing starts or shortly thereafter. During breaks, interpreters must disconnect and reconnect promptly using the same access code.



## Activity No. 4: Interpretation for Rent Board Meetings and Board Appeal Hearings

- The contractor will provide U.S.-based, certified interpreters for onsite/in-person participation in Rent Board Meetings and Appeal Hearings, typically starting at 5:00 p.m. PDT on the third Wednesday of each month. Interpretation outside regular business hours (9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. PDT) will not incur higher billing rates.



## Activity No. 5: Interpretation for Counseling Sessions

- The contractor will provide U.S.-based, certified interpreters for onsite, phone, or videoconference participation in Rent Board Counseling Sessions, held Monday through Friday during normal business hours (9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. PDT).



## Activity No. 6: Interpretation for Community Workshops

- The contractor will provide U.S.-based, certified interpreters for onsite, phone, or videoconference simultaneous translation at Rent Program Community Workshops or similar events, as requested by Rent Board staff.



## Recommended Action

- APPROVE the contract for interpretation services with Accent on Languages not to exceed \$26,200 for Fiscal Year 2024-25 prorated from the date the contract is executed – Rent Program (Nicolas Traylor).

*This page intentionally left blank*