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April 21, 2021

The Honorable Councilmember Paul Krekorian
Chair, Budget and Finance Committee
Room 395, City Hall
Los Angeles, CA 90012

RE: PROPOSED BUDGET FISCAL YEAR (FY) 2021-22

Dear Councilmember Krekorian:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments regarding the proposed Department on Disability (DOD or Department) budget for FY 2021-22. As you know, the fiscal situation triggered by the ongoing COVID-19 emergency this past year required each department to identify reductions to offset reduced revenue projections. As such, in consultation with the Office of the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO), the Department did not fill **two** critically important vacant positions. In addition, the Department's staffing has been further reduced in two key operational areas due to the implementation of the Separation Incentive Program (SIP). While the Department recognizes that the Mayor's recommendations to restore most of the operational reductions imposed this program year will go a long way to support our current service levels, the Department respectfully requests that the City Council consider the negative impacts that the elimination of the two positions has had (and will continue to have) on the Department's core functions and its ability to ensure that the City is in compliance with federal and state legislation.

To address ongoing needs resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath, the DOD is requesting Council to restore funding and provide position authority for the two positions deleted as a result of the SIP, to allocate funds and provide position authority to convert two existing part-time into full-time positions, and to continue As-Needed funds and add position authority to provide for Student Professional Workers. The Department believes that these requests will address critical gaps in the City's American with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance, expand accessible communications citywide, and have a major impact on risk management for the City.

Department on Disability COVID Response

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Safer at Home directive, Department staff were deployed to provide ADA compliance reviews of the emergency shelters, A Bridge Home (ABH) sites, and COVID-19 testing and vaccination sites. Department staff coordinated Sign Language Interpretation (SLI) and Virtual Remote Interpretation (VRI) services to ensure that impacted deaf

and hard of hearing individuals were provided accessible communication. The DOD also expanded SLI services for elected and appointed individuals, and worked with the Emergency Management Department Joint Information Center (JIC) and individual departmental Public Information Officers (PIO) to ensure that critical public safety information was provided in accessible formats for the disability community. While these efforts should be standard operating procedures in all Level I Emergency Operations Center (EOC) activations, the Department lacks the fiscal resources to sustain these operations for an extended period of time, particularly with regards to ensuing overtime costs. As the pandemic continued, the Department (initially with support from the Office of the Mayor and subsequently with support from City Council) launched a daily meals delivery program for households with individuals with disabilities. Then, working in partnership with the State Council on Developmental Disabilities and the Citibank Foundation, the Department stood up distribution sites for Personal Protective Equipment and non-perishable food supplies to the disability community. Most recently, the Department worked on addressing vaccine equity issues for people with disabilities and hosted mobile vaccine sites staffed by Kaiser Permanente personnel. This work was in addition to providing coverage for the Mass Care seat and the Disability Access and Functional Needs (DAFN) Technical Specialist seat in the EOC.

Critical Budget Recommendations

Under the ADA and §508 of the Rehabilitation Act, the City is required to ensure that all City digital content is accessible – including websites and documents posted to them – to people with disabilities. The CALIF v. Los Angeles emergency preparedness settlement reaffirmed this requirement. As City departments become increasingly dependent on web-based solutions for both personnel and public facing functions, there are significant risk management issues posed by the City’s current level of compliance with federal and state mandates.

As a result of this obligation, the Department is requesting funding and authority to reconfigure two positions to address accessible communication. Specifically, the Department is requesting that Council authorize a Systems Analyst position (by restoring a Management Analyst position deleted as part of the SIP) and authorize a Graphic Designer position (by converting a part time program aide position and funding to a full-time Graphic Designer position).

1. Systems Analyst [ADA/Rehabilitation Act §508 Specialist] (\$87,300).

This request will restore the lead staff person responsible for the City’s obligation to ensure effective and accessible communication under §508 of the Rehabilitation Act and Title II of the ADA. The individual will:

- Provide training to key City employees from each department who are responsible for the public dissemination of digital content;
- Remediate documents (reports, manuals, training, materials, newsletters, etc. citywide) for City department websites or emails that are inaccessible;
- Address systemic changes in digital accessibility throughout the City, including: emergency notification messaging; Video Remote Interpreting at temporary shelters, testing sites, and medical facilities; online training for employees; Zoom accessibility for public and employee meetings; and launching the electronic survey of the City’s ADA Transition Plan.
- Provide usability testing as needed (to ensure people with disabilities can navigate programs) for websites, apps, and digital services provided by City departments.
- Establish a §508 Remediation Team & Compliance Resource Center in collaboration with ITA to expand protocols for remediating high-profile projects/reports/plans generated by the Mayor’s Office, City Council, and other City departments.

- Expand the Department's Web Accessibility Resource Intranet and move toward an online training platform to ensure each department retains staff updated on §508 requirements.

2. Graphic Designer II [ADA/Rehabilitation Act §508 Compliance] (\$71,980)

This request will support the Department's efforts to publish public safety and disability resource information in accessible electronic and hardcopy formats.

The Department requests the conversion of the part-time program aide into a full-time Graphic Designer position to support the PIO's work in ensuring equitable communication and messaging. During the pandemic, the Department made significant strides in supporting other City departments in providing critical information in accessible formats. However, in relying exclusively on the part-time Program Aide, the Department was unable to keep up with the demand. As such, the DOD is seeking a full-time graphic designer that would support the Department's Public Information Officer's initiatives to train affiliated departments in developing ADA/508 compliant visual content. This position would also train the communication teams of other City departments on how to incorporate digitally accessible elements to improve equitable communication and messaging in documents, social media platforms and websites. In short, this position will allow our department and affiliated departments to disseminate up to date, rapidly changing information on programs implemented to mitigate the pandemic, homelessness crisis, and poverty concerns.

In alignment with the rapidly Mayor's proposed increased services to address the homelessness crisis, the Department requests a position authority for a Legislative Representative (by restoring and augmenting funding for a Management Analyst position deleted as part of the SIP) and the conversion of a part time program aide position into a full time Community Program Assistant II position.

3. Legislative Representative (\$116,910)

The Legislative Representative rapidly is critical to the Department's effort to ensure comprehensive input in federal, state, and local legislation being developed and undergoing reauthorization. This individual will be tasked with managing key DOD programs addressing homelessness and COVID response, tracking and developing legislative and administrative processes impacting the disability community, providing public awareness and working with the Office of the Chief Legislative Analyst staff to ensure that Council can support (as appropriate) proposed legislation, and providing the Department with intelligence of associated funding opportunities resulting from legislative developments. The Department is committed to expanding its funding base and will rely extensively on this individual to identify and respond to new opportunities for public, private, and philanthropic sources of revenue.

4. Community Program Assistant II (\$67,980)

The Department requests the conversion of a part-time Program Aide position (serving A Bridge Home sites) into a full-time Community Program Assistant II position to support the Department's efforts to combat the rising homelessness crisis among individuals with disabilities. This position would be tasked with improving the level of support for referral requests emanating from the 32 existing ABH locations, from the 23 pipelined Project Room Key locations, and from additional projects coming on board. This position would also support the City's initiatives by conducting outreach, and identifying and connecting disabled residents requiring Durable Medical Equipment (DME), with an emphasis on veterans with disabilities and transgender individuals.

This request would expand the Department's efforts in combating homelessness. Currently, the Department has one full-time Community Program Assistant II position that provides linkages to disability related resources and services for all incoming referrals, including those from the Mayor's Unified Homeless Response Center (UHRC), and the City's Comprehensive Homeless Strategy stakeholders.

5. Student Professional Workers (\$37,230)

The Department is requesting that the Council support level funding for the As Needed line item, after accounting for the recommended conversion of two part time positions into full time positions as described above.

In an effort to expand the City's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiatives, the Department is proposing to provide part-time employment opportunities for students with disabilities. At present the federal and state governments provide alternative routes for public sector employments for individuals with disabilities (Schedule A hiring opportunities in the federal government and LEAP hiring opportunities in state government). Through the Targeted Local Hire (TLH) initiative, the City has similarly made strides in improving the employment opportunities for non-traditional candidates. In fact, the Department used the TLH to onboard an individual in the Administrative Clerk track. This individual continues to work for the Department and is a stellar example of how productive these alternative routes are for the public sector.

While the Department has been able to provide work experience opportunities for students with disabilities, these have traditionally been unpaid internships. The Department would like to provide paid internships for students with disabilities in competitive integrated environments, including within the Department and in affiliated City departments. Research has demonstrated that students who acquire work experience not only graduate at higher rates but also increase the likelihood of being employed post-graduation (and have higher life time earnings). This initiative would help reduce the poverty that students with disabilities often experience despite having successfully completed college graduate requirements.

Thank you for your consideration of these requests. The Department stands ready to continue providing the higher quality of service expected throughout the City to reduce accessibility-related risk for all City services, programs and facilities as the City transitions into a post-COVID-19 new normal. If I can provide additional information or answer any questions, please feel free to contact me at (213) 202-2764.

Sincerely,



Stephen David Simon
Executive Director

- c: Barbara Romero, Deputy Mayor, City Services
Ashley Stracke, Neighborhood Services Director, Mayor's Office
Daniela Cuevas, Analyst, City Administrative Office