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STEPHEN DAVID SIMON
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

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) 2022-23

Dear Councilmember Krekorian:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments regarding the proposed Department on Disability (DOD or Department) budget for FY 2022-23. Our Department is appreciative that the Mayor's office understands and supports the Department's programmatic, operational, and fiscal needs for the coming fiscal year. As the Department continues to grow, the approved requests go a long way toward helping the City meet its goals and mandates related to service, equity, and statutory compliance.

- The *Accessible Communications Specialist* (Project Coordinator) will not only help meet the growing demand for technical assistance from City Departments, it will also safeguard the City's ability to comply with federal and state legal mandates, reducing the City's overall legal liability.
- The *Disability and Homeless Services Analyst* (Management Analyst) will be key to helping DOD grow over the long term, allowing it to address the organizational requirements of individual programs and initiatives.
- The *Additional Overtime Funding* will allow the Department to respond to emergencies and fulfill its outreach work without depleting staff availability as a result of excessive banked overtime hours.

Critical Budget Recommendations

While the Department clearly recognizes that the Mayor's budget proposal will enhance the Department's operational capacity, the Department respectfully requests that the City Council consider the adverse impacts of the proposed funding structure on the DOD's ability to implement programs fully, effectively, and immediately.

The proposed budget recommends that the two new positions (mentioned above) be funded at six months, essentially limiting the Department's ability to begin hiring these much-needed positions until after January of 2023. The same funding arrangement was adopted for two positions in the current fiscal year, which has led to a cascade of administrative delays in filling positions. In order to gain access to the most qualified and competitive candidates and to begin providing vital services quickly, the Department must be permitted to seek and recruit potential employees as soon as possible. To address this concern, DOD is respectfully requesting that City Council provide nine months of funding (and position authority at the beginning of the fiscal year) for each of the two new positions.

The Department is also asking for the reinstatement of funding in the As-Needed Salaries Account to provide for the *Student Professional Worker Program*. Full funding of this program would permit DOD to hire students to fill at least six (6) part-time programmatic and administrative positions within the Department. Students will receive paid experience in fields devoted to the service of people with disabilities. 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 lifetime earnings). This initiative would help reduce the poverty that students with disabilities often experience despite having successfully completed college and graduate school requirements. The Department will use its unique network of community partners and service providers to recruit students with disabilities. In an effort to expand the City's Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility (DEIA) initiatives, the Department is proposing to continue this special program for students with disabilities.

Additional Requests

The Department would also like Council to consider two additional position authorities and funding to help address key gaps in City services to our constituency. Specifically, the Department is requesting an Assistant Chief Grants Administrator and an exempt Senior Project Coordinator for Deaf Services. These positions would focus on strengthening the relationships with allied City and County departments, to provide technical assistance and capacity building to contracted service providers, and to coordinate with local, State, and Federal entities to ensure that the needs of the disability community are addressed.

The *Assistant Chief Grants Administrator* would be responsible for the solicitation of, oversight, and implementation of grant funding for the Department, with an emphasis on initiatives targeting homeless individuals with disabilities. This individual would:

- Oversee the development of grant proposals and policies and procedures consistent with grant awards.

- Provide expert recommendations to the Executive team, Commission on Disability, Mayor, City Council, and other public and private stakeholders on initiatives that impact the disability community.
- Manage contract monitoring for service providers and vendors.
- Oversee and monitor projects for compliance with Federal, State, and local governmental policies and grant requirements.

The Department recently lost its remaining staff member with ties to the Deaf Community and ability to conduct sign language interpretation. Our Deaf Services Coordinator left DOD last year due to the Separation Incentive Program. The Department proposes to add an exempt *Senior Project Coordinator* to serve as the key departmental liaison within DOD to the Deaf Community and would work across divisions to ensure that the needs of this community are addressed. The individual would:

- Provide technical assistance to constituents, City departments, and employees on Auxiliary Aids and Accessible Technologies
- Ensure that Sign Language and CART service requests are handled in a timely manner, and if necessary, would assist with last minute requests for interpretation services
- Assist First Responder departments on developing appropriate policies and training materials to interact effectively with the Deaf, Deaf/Blind, and Hard of Hearing community.

Policy Recommendation

As the City formalizes language access policies and practices by establishing a language access program in the City of Los Angeles, all aspects of language access must incorporate accessible communication. DOD recommends that the City review its existing policies to ensure equitable compensation for certified Sign Language Interpreters consistent with other employees who receive foreign language bonuses.

Presently, the Sign Language Premium language in many Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) stipulates that “ASL interpreters receive compensation equal to two and three-quarter percent (2.75%) of their salary or wages for each business day the skill is utilized.” In contrast, the premium paid for bilingual interpreters is much higher as the language in many MOU states that “...a bilingual bonus of \$100.00 per biweekly pay period for duties requiring conversing fluently in a language other than English, or \$200.00 per biweekly pay period for duties requiring conversing fluently and interpreting a language other than English. The bilingual premium payment is pensionable when regularly assigned.”

Providing equal pay and benefits for similar functions would bridge the inequitable practices among employees who provide the same effective communication services regardless of language.

Should you have any questions, you may contact me by phone at (213) 202-2757, or my budget Director, Sergio Samayoa, at (213) 202-2752.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'SD Simon', enclosed within a thin black rectangular border.

Stephen David Simon
Executive Director

SDS:jhp:srs

cc: Mary Hodge, Deputy Mayor, City Services
Riki Esquer, Neighborhood Services, Mayor's Office
Zenay Hayward, Neighborhood Services, Mayor's Office
Vanessa Vigil, Analyst, City Administrative Office