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Office of the Governor

December 10, 2014

Commission on Services for Persons with Disabilities
Brian Patchett, Chair
3416 Goni Rd., Suite D-132
Carson City, NV 89706

Dear Mr. Patchett,

I would like to thank you and the Commission on Services for Persons with Disabilities for your letter concerning the FY 16/17 budget for Aging and Disability Services Division (ADSD). Specifically, your request to review the elimination of proposed budget items designed to support services for persons who are blind or visually impaired and persons who are deaf, hard of hearing, or speech impaired. I have met with the Director of Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), Romaine Gilliland, and am confident that proper consideration has been given to each of the listed items.

DHHS and ADSD appreciates the difficulty experienced by persons who are deaf, hard of hearing, or speech impaired when trying to access services. It is for this reason that the Division has always maintained contracts with companies that provide interpreter services. The Division has also worked diligently with the Purchasing Division to create a statewide contract that could be accessed by any state agency. It was proposed to the Division that a pool of interpreters could be created that then be accessed by any agency who needed them. However, it was not clear what number would be necessary to provide this service, the Division had no way to estimate the costs nor a method to fund the service, and there were concerns raised by other members of the community that it would deprive the community of access to the small number of qualified interpreters currently available. It is for these reasons that ADSD could not include the pool of interpreters in their budget request. ADSD strongly supports working with the Purchasing Division as well as with other agencies to assist them in using the existing methods for contracting with interpreters that currently exist. Providing an interpreter for a consumer is not an optional service and is, in fact, an ADA accommodation. ADSD feels that stronger efforts to educate agencies on the ADA requirements as well as easier methods of contracting for this service should prove more effective at resolving the long term problem of increasing availability and access to services for persons who are deaf, hard of hearing, and speech disabled without negatively impacting the community as a whole by decreasing their access to community interpreting services.

The Commission recommended the Division create a program to support persons who are blind or visually impaired. It was initially estimated that \$500,000 could provide a small program to serve this population of people who are not currently able to access the necessary training and assistive technology. Creating the budget involves difficult choices, and at the time of creation,

ADSD did not have a funding source that could be utilized to start an entirely new program. The Division will work diligently to find other sources of funding to develop this much needed program. In addition, the Division will continue to work with the Vocational Rehabilitation Division to find alternative ways to provide these services in the future.

ADSD did include an enhancement unit in the Agency Request budget to restore money used for advocacy for persons who are deaf and hard of hearing. This advocacy function had previously been paid for using money from the telephone surcharge. However, the Public Utilities Commission ruled that it was not an activity that should be supported by the surcharge. The Division has an open appeal with the Nevada Supreme Court to ask for clarification on this issue.

Thank you for bringing this matter to my attention. I appreciate the work and advocacy provided by the Commission on Services for Persons with Disabilities to the citizens of Nevada.

Sincere regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Michael Willden", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

MICHAEL WILLDEN
Chief of Staff