



THE STATE
of **ALASKA**
GOVERNOR BILL WALKER

**Department of Labor and
Workforce Development**

Office of the Commissioner

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March 10, 2015

The Honorable Mark Neuman
The Honorable Steve Thompson
Co-Chairs of House Finance Committee
State Capitol Building
Juneau, AK 99801-1182

Dear Representatives Neuman and Thompson,

This letter is to provide additional information regarding the Department of Labor and Workforce Development's Interpreter Referral program that has not been funded in the FY2016 Governor's Amended budget.

The Interpreter Referral (IR) program was established in the 1990s when phone service was basic and internet service was not widely available. Many organizations at the time were not aware of their responsibilities under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) to provide interpretation services in response to a request for an accommodation from an individual. The IR program was created to facilitate the connection between sign language interpreters and the individuals or organizations that required interpretation services. The elimination of the IR program will require a new business model where the interpreter will need to market themselves to the individuals or organizations that may need interpretation services.

The IR program funding currently goes to two grantees, Southeast Alaska Independent Living Center in Juneau and Access Alaska in Fairbanks. In FY2014, these organizations coordinated 392 referrals to individuals seeking interpretation services for an average cost of approximately \$300.00 per referral. There are currently 10 interpreters between the two communities and many of the individuals seeking interpretation services are familiar with the interpreters available.

This program does not cover the cost of the interpretation services. If an individual is seeking interpretation services for a personal situation, they would likely be responsible to pay, but if assistance is requested for a professional services appointment (i.e. legal or medical) then the professional services provider are required to pay under ADA. Medicaid pays for interpretation services in some circumstances.

Please let me know if you have further questions. I welcome the opportunity to speak with you on these or any other topics related to the department.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Heidi Drygas".

Heidi Drygas
Commissioner