

**From:** [Cathy McCarthy](#)  
**To:** [Senate Finance Committee](#)  
**Cc:** [Heather Shadduck](#); [Doug Toelle](#); [Jim Beck \(jbeck@accessalaska.org\)](#)  
**Subject:** IR Program  
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**Attachments:** [image001.png](#)

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March 31, 2015

Senate Finance Committee

State Capitol Building

Juneau, AK 99801-1182

Dear Members of the Senate Finance Committee,

This letter is in response to Commissioner Drygas' letter, dated 3/10/15 to Rep. Neuman and Rep. Thompson regarding the Department of Labor and Workforce Development's Interpreter Referral (IR) program that has not been funded in the FY 2016 Governor's Amended budget. I urge you to fully reinstate the IR program budget.

Currently, there are two certified interpreters that reside in Fairbanks. They work full time, attend school full time, have families, and have side projects in addition to interpreting for the community. They do not have the time to market themselves, coordinate with businesses, invoice for assignments and do the follow up. As much as our interpreters care about and are involved with the deaf community, it is not realistic to say that interpreters have the ability to put in that kind of effort if the IR program is cut. Market models may work in a large city where interpreters can make a living (and devote the necessary time and attention to marketing). But in a small community like Fairbanks, the market model will not work here.

Interpreter services are not a commodity that can answer to supply and demand. Interpreters provide a service that allows our city to be in compliance with federal law. It supports the ongoing need to educate business owners and the community at large about the ADA's obligation to our deaf citizens. Given our current interpreter shortage, an individual marketing themselves as an interpreter would not have time to do the outreach, ADA education and advocacy. The deaf community is such a vulnerable population, that their ability to self-advocate is severely limited. This advocacy is a core part of the IR program.

We see a similar challenge with businesses in Fairbanks. It is a challenge to keep businesses up to date and aware of ADA requirements. Eliminating the IR program further isolates the deaf and hard of hearing individuals in this community. The greatest barrier between the deaf community and our hearing society is the timely availability of accurate communication services in order to access goods and services in Fairbanks and Juneau. Cutting the IR program grant only negatively affects the deaf and hard of hearing in absolutely critical ways—medically, legally, getting an education, and job opportunities.

An oversight body is essential to ensure that people who call themselves ‘Interpreters’ are actually credentialed to interpret. The ethical intimacy and vulnerability in the interpreter work is critical. Interpreters who give opinions or do not directly interpret what a doctor may be saying, could be the difference between informed choice and dire harm.

Further, the IR program requires AKRID (Alaska Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf) level training annually for interpreters to maintain their credentials and skill levels. The IR program also requires outreach and education to businesses to understand their responsibilities under the ADA. Without this independent and supportive oversight, the State will fail some of the most vulnerable citizens in their short sighted abandonment of the Interpreter Referral program. This is not about a business model and marketing, it is about filling a gap in communication – if each representative considered what it would be like to be unable to understand what their doctor, lawyer or employer was saying to them in a matter of life and death, and they would demand someone to interpret the meeting for them. This is a basic civil right, protected by law, not a business decision.

Please let me know if you have further questions. I welcome the opportunity to speak with you about the Interpreter Referral program and how it works in our community.

Thank you for your diligence and oversight during this challenging legislative session.

Sincerely,

Cathy McCarthy, LCSW

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