Introduction
Oregon is facing shortage of qualified American Sign Language (ASL) Interpreters. As of 2012, it is estimated that 160,899 or 2.8 percent Oregonians between the ages of 18 and 64 have a hearing disability\(^1\). Quality interpreters are vital to communication for these individuals to ensure equal access to health, employment and social services that enhance their lives, bringing choice, dignity and independence to the people we serve.

Interpreter rates have been stagnant across all agencies, with the exception of the Oregon Justice Department (OJD) since 1999. Stagnant rates result in substandard work, high turnover \(^2\) and limited language access for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Oregonians. Oregon must adjust its interpreter rates to ensure a robust and qualified source of interpreters is available for individuals working in Oregon and those receiving services from its state government.

Included in this proposal is the background and context of the Oregon’s Deaf community and the interpreters that serve them, the current issues facing interpreter scheduling, a market analysis of ASL interpreter rates, as well as fiscal and policy recommendations to decrease the shortage of qualified ASL interpreters in Oregon.

Background and Context
In 2011, the Oregon State Hospital convened a work group to address the pay levels of ASL interpreters. Their final proposal included a pay matrix using certifications, education and experience as a basis for the ladders of


pay. It was their recommendation that a new interpreter, lacking certification, with a Bachelors of Science in Interpretation be started at $25.00 per hour and an interpreter with both a bachelor’s degree and certification starting at $37.50 per hour. The same matrix listed a master level certified interpreter possessing more than 20 years of experience maximizing pay at $65.50 per hour.

Since the creation of this previous proposal several factors have changed. First, the certificate exams and levels have been reorganized under the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) organization, discontinuing the testing for certifications that were recognized both under the current 1999 matrix and the 2011 proposed matrix. While some certifications that were obtained in the past 20 years are still recognized by RID, the new interpreters are granted certification on a new scale\(^3\), making the current matrix and pay scale obsolete.

Pay scales and certification standards have not only affected ASL interpreters; they have also altered delivery of services for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Oregonians. At this time, both the Department of Human Services (DHS) and the Capitol have one full time staff member dedicated to interpreter scheduling and other Deaf and Hard of Hearing accommodations. Scheduling has become precarious in recent years due to staff shortages and aging software leading Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals, advocates and allies to address these issues by asking Legislators to establish an office of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services that would centralize scheduling for all agencies, statewide. The legislation drafted in 2015 to create this office did not pass the Ways and Means Committee; in lieu of its passage, the Legislature appropriated $200,000 for a community needs assessment to be performed by a qualified vendor. With the community needs assessment due in 2017, interpreter rates and

scheduling issues still pose a barrier to language access for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Oregonians.

**Market Analysis**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Entity</th>
<th>Minimum Rate</th>
<th>Maximum Rate</th>
<th>Percent Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>$60</td>
<td>$85</td>
<td>41.18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>$55</td>
<td>$67</td>
<td>29.41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington King County</td>
<td>$61</td>
<td>$74</td>
<td>43.53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>$42.50</td>
<td>$48</td>
<td>38.04%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lower rate of pay on average than California and Washington

Data from the California Department of General Services, the Washington State Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, and the Oregon Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services Program.

The market analysis covers the West Coast states of California, Oregon and Washington. In using California and Washington as comparative states it becomes apparent, that Oregon is not offering competitive wages. Recruitment and retention of interpreters becomes difficult when Oregon is not paying competitive rates. Using data from the California Department of General Services, the Washington State Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, and the Oregon Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services Program, the

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current pay pay matrix employed by the State of Oregon has a base pay rate that is 38.04% below the comparative market.

Fiscal and Policy Recommendations

It is the recommendation of the DHS Aging and People with Disabilities program, in conjunction with the Oregon Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services Advisory Committee, that the current rate paid to interpreters must increase. We are proposing that interpreters that meet the minimum qualifications will start at $55 per hour and maximize their rate of pay at $65 per hour, beginning in April 2016. This rate should increase the pool of qualified interpreters that can provide services to Oregonians.

In addition to increasing the pay rate, a short term goal for all state agencies should be transparency. This could be done through a directory of ASL interpreters or agencies that the State contracts with as California and Idaho do. These directories are available online which makes it easy to update information. This could also be done by publishing the names and contract numbers, certifications and rate of pay of ASL interpreters that contract with the State.

Another consideration is the rural and urban make up of Oregon. A long term recommendation is to configure separate pay scales for urban and
rural counties. As the cost of living is greater in urban areas than in rural counties. Washington provides a good model, as they are comprised similar to Oregon with a higher concentration of people living in metropolitan areas along the I-5 corridor in the west, with rural communities to the east and along the coast. Washington publishes an online directory of ASL interpreters that contains their date of certification obtainment, and their rate of pay for King County, the most urban and densely populated, and all other Washington Counties. ASL interpreters in King County Washington are paid at a higher rate to meet the cost of living in the metropolitan area.

Conclusion
In order to meet the needs of Deaf and Hard of Hearing consumers in Oregon, the State must increase the pay scale, starting at a rate of $55 an hour, beginning in April 2016. The State will face recruitment and retention issues if the pay scale remains at the 1999 level. Furthermore, increasing transparency for all consumers will help employees and agencies find available interpreters, allowing them to comply with Title II of the ADA.

Next Steps
If this proposal is accepted, DHS will convene a statewide meeting of agencies that utilize interpreter services. The proposal will be presented to them for feedback. DHS will then proceed to make a final decision, considering the input provided by state agencies.