

MHBE Board Meeting

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Language Line Costs

Presented by:

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MHBE utilizes the Maryland State contract with Language Line Services through the Board of Public Works (BPW) to provide third party translation services at the call center for consumers who are not fluent in English.

Although BPW, not MHBE, is the custodian of this contract, we're adding some clarity to this expenditure and asking the Board to approve spending on this item.

Cost Summary

- FY18 costs were just under \$150,000
- FY19 costs were \$222,170, but split between two contracts, each of which was less than \$200,000, because BPW renegotiated the state-wide contract in February 2019.
- FY20 costs were expected to be \$200,000 but the state contract sets an initial limit on purchase orders for language line services for all state agencies - that limit for MHBE for FY20 was \$168,000
- FY20 costs are now expected to be \$218,000 due to higher than average monthly use and an unexpected surge in call volume in April
- FY21 budget is \$200,000

Utilization

- Noted increase in volume of Spanish calls since Open Enrollment (OE) 6
- MHBE has worked with Maximus to review and record new IVR (Interactive Voice Response) prompts in Spanish to steer callers to the Spanish assistance queue rather than assistance with Language Line translators
- Working on reducing reliance on Language Line for Spanish translation by increasing utilization of bilingual customer service representatives (CSRs) to goal of 35+
- Typical number of bi-lingual CSRs varies due to availability in employment market (usually 20-25)
- However, although majority of language line users are Spanish speakers, not all – Mandarin, Amharic, French and Vietnamese are

Other Factors

- Increased impact of marketing efforts to non-English speaking communities (a win!)
- (Example – of the nearly 39,000 COVID-related Special Enrollments, 8,000 individuals identify as Hispanic or Chinese)
- Although we've seen the overall CSC volume decrease, the calls that do come in are from English as a Second Language (ESL) households, or households with more complex situations, or who need extra help understanding English concepts
- Increased handling time is disadvantageous to the vendor so they are incentivized to increase bilingual CSRs where possible - Last month's new-hire class of 26 CSRs, included 19 new bilingual staff, for a current total of 30

Request to Approve NTE Amounts for FY20 and FY21

MHBE requests the Board's approval to increase the Not to Exceed (NTE) amount of \$218,000 for FY20 and an NTE amount of \$200,000 for FY21 through the BPW's state contract for Language Line services.