



INFORMATION REPORT

TO: Mayor and Members General Issues Committee	WARD(S) AFFECTED: CITY WIDE
COMMITTEE DATE: February 14, 2013	
SUBJECT/REPORT NO: Language Line Enhancement (Report FSC13020) (City Wide)	
SUBMITTED BY: Mike Zegarac Acting General Manager Finance & Corporate Services	PREPARED BY: Jane Lee 905 546-2424 ext. 2654
SIGNATURE:	

Council Direction:

Not applicable

Information:

The Customer Service, Access and Equity Division has submitted a 2013 Budget Enhancement Request for \$10,000 (\$15,000 annualized) to enhance the use of the Language Line for telephone interpretation throughout the organization. This information report provides background information related to this enhancement request.

The Customer Service, Access and Equity Division subscribes annually to the Language Line services in order to assist citizens whose first language is not English and who may need interpretation services during phone calls with the City. Currently costs are approximately \$5,500-\$6,000 per year. The Customer Contact Centre pays the monthly subscription fee and departments are charged for the per minute cost of the call when the service is used. The departments who utilize the service most frequently are the Public Health Department and Corporate Services (Customer Contact Centre). The per minute cost of the call varies depending on the language required. Call length also determines the cost of the call.

In 2011, the City averaged 9 calls a month at an average cost of \$50 per call. Primary languages where interpretation was required were Russian, Spanish, Cantonese, Vietnamese, Arabic, French, Tigrinya and Karen, with over 20 different languages accessed.

In 2012, the City averaged 7 calls per month at an average cost of \$60 per call. Primary languages where interpretation was required were Arabic, Mandarin, Urdu, Korean, Nepali, French and Punjabi, with over 20 different languages accessed.

In the 2011 Workforce Census (TWI Inc), employees were asked about the need for language assistance in their jobs. As noted on page 89 of the final report, "32% of respondents indicated that they could have benefited from informal interpretation assistance in their jobs." Of these 32%, it was noted in the report that 10% could benefit regularly, from daily to several times a month, and 22% could benefit monthly or less than monthly.

Feedback from staff about the use of the Language Line interpretation indicates a reluctance to utilize this resource due to the per minute charges which are charged back to the department. The enhancement proposed would provide additional budget to eliminate the chargeback to departmental staff, except in program areas where there is provincial funding, in order to encourage the use of this service in assisting citizens, and to more accurately assess the need for the service going forward. In areas where there is provincial funding, the per minute cost of the calls will continue to be charged back as they currently are.

Ensuring that this service is available and utilized broadly across the organization will assist the City in ensuring that we provide a higher level of service to our diverse community members, and that we enhance the opportunity for Hamilton to be seen as a welcoming community for immigrants who may seek to settle and establish businesses in Hamilton.

An alternative to this enhancement would be to implement the pilot without the funding proposed and to monitor the impacts through budget variances, to more fully assess the funding required to encourage usage of the system.

A report back in early 2014 will assess impact of the removal of charge backs on the usage of the system.