**Proposal to Iowa Commission for the Blind**

**August 2, 2022**

**Requested Action**

IDB is requesting permission to use Gifts & Bequests funds to support the provision of braille and other accessible educational materials for SFY23 not to exceed $300,000.

**Background**

In SFY22 and in years prior, the Iowa Department of Education (DE) contracted with IDB and Iowa Prison Industries (IPI) to provide accessible educational materials to K12 students. Under these contracts, IDB could directly bill the DE for up to $305,000 in personnel costs and $500,000 in materials costs.

In February 2019, IDB informed DE of concerns regarding Iowa Prison Industries’’ (IPI) handling of student data and the quality of braille materials produced by IPI. IDB was assured by DE these concerns would be addressed. Over the next two and a half years, IDB continued to find evidence that these concerns were not addressed. IDB shared this evidence with DE, IPI, and Iowa Educational Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired (IESBVI) and offered assistance and solutions to solve these problems. After coming across deeply troubling information regarding a registered sex offender who had been released on parole having access to student names and school addresses in the fall of 2021, IDB contacted our Assistant Attorney General and the Governor’s office for assistance. Emails to the Governor’s office were discovered in a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request from KCRG-TV and the report and memos can be found at: https://www.kcrg.com/2022/02/16/state-agency-believes-prisoners-had-access-students-information-took-more-than-two-years-make-change/

During the June 20, 2022 Zoom meeting between IDB and representatives of DE and in follow-up emails, representatives of the Department of Education shared with IDB the following information:

* IDB will now be required to bill districts directly for accessible educational materials.
* Districts were not aware of this change until July 20, 2022 and had no indication that such a change was coming and no ability to plan for this in their current school year budget.
* Districts would need to use their current special education funds to cover the cost of materials for students with an Individual Education Plan (IEP) but they cannot use special education dollars to purchase materials for students receiving accommodations through a 504 plan.
* No additional funding is being provided to the districts to cover these new costs, but districts could apply to the Department of Education to request additional funding.
* IDB was given an extension of our materials contract to September 30, 2022, with an increase of $75,000 to cover the cost of materials ordered between July 1, 2022 and September 30, 2022.
* During the June 20th meeting, IDB was told that we would be receiving our $305,000 contract for personnel costs, however, as of July 28, we have not received this contract.
* Iowa Educational Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired (IESBVI) and the Area Education Agencies (AEAs) will be creating a process to ensure the quality of braille materials. Between these organizations, there is only one certified braille transcriber or proofreader on staff.

**Actions Taken By IDB**

* IDB has moved a part-time accounting clerk to full time in order to handle the need to now invoice and collect payment from 64 individual districts.
* IDB is offering discounts on materials costs of 70%% for consumable items and discounts of 50% for non-consumable if districts return materials to be added to the collection and used by other students.
* In addition to procuring and putting into place the Athena system for managing orders (going live this fall) and streamlining the process for those ordering materials. IDB will be adding a module for the vendors who produce the braille that will allow vendors to bid on projects and create greater transparency on project timelines. This will ensure that districts are getting the lowest cost and the materials are coming from quality vendors that follow commonly accepted transcription standards.
* IDB has created ordering procedures and a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for school districts and offered guidance and training to help districts navigate the new process. More information can be found at https://idbimclibrary.blog.

IDB is confident that, if we receive the personnel contract, that we will be able to use our existing funding sources to meet all costs and provide AEM to all students who need them. However, if we do not receive the personnel contract, will be challenged to meet our payroll budget. Also, we are currently waiting on $150,000 in overdue payments from the DE for materials ordered in SFY22. We have concerns that this new process will create cash flow challenges. In order to ensure that there is no disruption in services, we are asking for the ability to use G&B funds as described above to cover these costs if necessary.