

# CITY OF RIVERSIDE

Commission of The Deaf

3900 Main Street • Riverside, California 92522 • (951) 826-8977 • COTD@riversideca.gov

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April 8, 2026

**The Honorable Patricia Lock Dawson**

Mayor, City of Riverside  
3900 Main Street, Riverside, California 92522

**Mr. Mike Futrell**

City Manager, City of Riverside  
3900 Main Street, Riverside, California 92522

**Re:** Formal Request to Establish an Office of Deaf & Disability Support (ODDS) in the City of Riverside — Effective Fiscal Year 2026–2027 (commencing July 1, 2026)

Dear Mayor Lock Dawson and City Manager Futrell,

The Riverside Commission of The Deaf (COTD), in coordination with the Commission on Disabilities, respectfully submits this formal request that the City of Riverside establish, fund, and operationalize an **Office of Deaf & Disability Support (ODDS)** beginning with Fiscal Year 2026–2027, which commences on July 1, 2026. We request that this office be created at the same organizational level as the Mayor's Office of Sustainability, signaling the City's commitment to equity and full community participation as core municipal priorities.

Riverside is home to one of the largest Deaf American Sign Language–using communities in the United States, anchored by the California School for the Deaf–Riverside (CSD–Riverside) and supported by a robust network of disability advocates, service providers, and community organizations. Despite this significant population, the City currently lacks a dedicated, centralized office with the authority, staff, and budget to coordinate accessibility compliance, deliver direct services, and represent disabled and Deaf residents systematically across all city departments. This gap is both a missed opportunity and a structural inequity that the Commission believes the City is well positioned to address.

## **I. The Case for a Dedicated Office**

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The establishment of a dedicated municipal disability office is not unprecedented—it is a proven model with measurable results. The City of Chicago's **Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities (MOPD)** has for decades served as a national model, with a mission to foster accessibility, full participation, and equal opportunities for people with disabilities through systemic change, information and referral, education and training, public policy, and direct services. Chicago's MOPD ensures that disability rights are equitably represented in all city services, programs, initiatives, and policies, and it operates a comprehensive structure

peer support, cultural programming, health and wellness resources, benefits navigation, and civic engagement opportunities. Modeled in part on successful Deaf community centers nationwide, the Riverside Deaf Center would affirm that the City recognizes Deaf culture and the ASL-using community as a distinct and valued cultural community, not merely a population requiring accommodation. The Deaf Center would work in close partnership with CSD–Riverside, the Commission on Disabilities, and regional Deaf-serving organizations to ensure programming reflects community priorities and lived experience.

### **III. Organizational Placement and Governance**

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The Commission respectfully requests that ODDS be established at the same organizational level as the Mayor's Office of Sustainability—reporting directly to the City Manager's Office and receiving a dedicated line-item budget appropriation. This placement is significant: it signals that disability inclusion is not a peripheral compliance function but a core civic value embedded in Riverside's organizational culture.

The office should be led by a Director individual fluent in American Sign Language, with demonstrated expertise in disability rights, ADA law, and community engagement—and, whenever possible, who is a person with lived Deaf and disability experience, in keeping with the principle of “nothing about us without us.” The existing Commission on Disabilities and Commission of the Deaf should formally advise the ODDS Director, ensuring ongoing community accountability.

### **IV. Fiscal Year 2026–2027 Funding Request**

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The Commission acknowledges the City's fiscal responsibilities and does not request this investment without recognizing the return it represents. Research consistently demonstrates that accessible cities attract broader economic participation: disabled and Deaf residents who receive coordinated support are more likely to maintain employment, reduce reliance on emergency services, and contribute as active economic actors in the community. In this respect, ODDS is a seed investment in Riverside's economic ecosystem, not a cost center.

The Commission requests that the FY 2026–2027 budget process include a dedicated appropriation for ODDS sufficient to fund, at minimum, the following personnel: a Director; one program coordinator focused on Deaf and hard of hearing services (with ASL fluency required); one Deaf Center coordinator to lead community hub programming and services; four ASL interpreters to provide communication access at City Council meetings, public hearings, Mayoral events, and Deaf Center programs; two community outreach specialists to engage Deaf, hard of hearing, and disabled residents across Riverside's neighborhoods; and two grants and contracts specialists with demonstrated expertise in procuring federal, state, and private external funding—responsible for identifying, applying for, and administering grants to sustain and expand ODDS operations; and four administrative assistants to support office operations, case management intake, and program administration. This staffing complement reflects the breadth of the office's mandate and the scale of the community it will serve.

The Commission further requests that the budget include a modest operating appropriation covering contracted interpreter overflow and specialized interpreting services beyond staff capacity, community outreach materials, accessibility site survey equipment, and program supplies. The two grants and contracts specialists will be charged from the outset with actively pursuing external revenue through federal programs—including HUD Community Development Block Grants, U.S. Administration for Community Living grants, and HRSA funding—as well as California state disability and public health funding streams and private philanthropic sources,

The Commission on Disabilities is prepared to work collaboratively with the Mayor's Office, the City Manager's Office, and the City Council to develop the detailed implementation plan for ODDS. We are available to present our recommendations at a City Council session or scheduled meeting at the City's convenience. We believe this office will meaningfully strengthen Riverside's identity as a city of belonging, opportunity, and universal design—values that align with our community's highest aspirations.

We thank you for your continued leadership and your attention to this important matter.

Respectfully submitted,

**Commission of the Deaf**

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Meets: 5:30 p.m., First Wednesday of each month, Art Pick Council Chamber

**cc:** Riverside City Council Members; Commission of the Deaf (COTD); City Attorney's Office; Office of Sustainability; COD@riversideca.gov; COTD@riversideca.gov

*Reference Models: Chicago Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities (MOPD) — [chicago.gov/mopd](http://chicago.gov/mopd) • Washington, D.C. Office of Disability Rights (ODR) — [odr.dc.gov](http://odr.dc.gov)*