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## **A new telebraille device is under development specifically for Washington State's deaf-blind residents**

**OLYMPIA** -- Deaf-blind residents of Washington State should have the world's most advanced tool designed for them to communicate with others over the telephone by the beginning of next year.

Under a contract with the Department of Social and Health Services' (DSHS) Office of Deaf and Hard of Hearing (ODHH), a New Zealand company called HumanWare is developing the best new telebraille device in more than a decade that includes the specific features and functions requested by deaf-blind people.

ODHH, which provides such devices free of charge to the state's more than 200 deaf-blind residents, has been forced to repeatedly repair old TeleBraille devices with a dwindling supply of parts since the original manufacturer stopped production in 1995.

So, ODHH actively sought bidders and picked HumanWare to develop a new and better Braille teletypewriter (TTY). HumanWare's \$500,000 contract calls for a finished product by the beginning of 2008.

HumanWare engineers have begun working with ODHH and deaf-blind clients for suggestions and tests of prototypes.

A telebraille device allows deaf-blind people to communicate directly over a phone line by typing and reading in Braille. It also allows the deaf-blind caller to reach a Washington Relay operator who facilitates the conversation with a hearing person.

Deaf-blind people have both hearing and vision loss. That person can be hard of hearing with limited vision, or totally deaf and totally blind. Washington has the second largest deaf-blind population in the nation.

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