



To: Oregon Governor Kate Brown
Multnomah County Chair Deborah Kafoury
Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler

From: Oregon Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf

RE: Critical Language Access in COVID-19 Communications

Date: March 23, 2019

Dear Governor Brown, Chair Kafoury, and Mayor Wheeler,

We are writing to you on behalf of The Oregon Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (ORID). Our organization works towards developing a community where users of spoken and signed languages can access information and communicate effectively without barriers. We strive for a society where the presence and perspectives of Deaf, DeafBlind, and hard-of-hearing community members are welcomed at all training, meetings, and events. **During this time of profound hardship and uncertainty, it is imperative that your offices partner with us in this mission by providing American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters at all of your events, as well as increase accessibility with captioning, in order to have these important messages reach all of your constituents.**

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, Portland metro Deaf and Hard of Hearing residents, as well as those across the state, have not had consistent access to information on important announcements from the State, County and City that directly impact all residents. We need to ensure equal access to information for all constituents during a time where information is critical and the situation is rapidly evolving. Like all Oregonians, the 187,000 Deaf, DeafBlind, and hard of hearing individuals in this state are concerned about this outbreak. However, they do not currently have access to the information they need to keep themselves and their families safe as well as in compliance with requests of state and local governments to prevent the spread of the disease.

In order for this community to have timely access to information, **every public briefing must have a qualified American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter present and visible on the screen of the broadcast.** It is also critical to provide captioning whenever possible. This also includes all State and local announcements released and press conferences held by your offices. We understand that you and your staff are under immense pressure, but we also believe that even in the midst of a crisis you genuinely value equity and inclusion. If these values are prioritized in planning processes, accommodations can be secured in a timely manner and at reasonable cost. Providing accommodation services as requested helps ensure you are in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act Title III (§ 36.303) and also sends a message to the communities that we work with that their health and safety are valued.

We suggest the following steps as best practices for providing interpreters:

1. Add a line item in your budget for accommodations for any event, just as you would for a meeting space, sound equipment, or refreshments.
2. Designate a contact person for all accommodations requests. Include an accessibility statement with their contact information on all promotional materials.

3. If American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters are needed for your event, put in a request to an interpreter agency or reach out directly to interpreters as soon as possible (ideally two weeks in advance, but given the current crisis, the need for immediate interpreter requests are understandable).
 - a. For a list of interpreting agencies in Oregon visit [Oregon Association of the Deaf's directory](#)
 - b. To find an interpreter in your area use [Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf's member search](#)
 - c. Provide all necessary information to the agency/interpreter including: name of the event, time, date, duration, location, names of participants, and any preparation materials (such as agenda, speeches, slide decks, and/or reference materials).
 - d. Work with interpreters and services-users before and during your event to ensure effective communication

**For televised emergency broadcasts it is recommended to use a Certified Deaf Interpreter, or a Deaf Interpreter in conjunction with a qualified ASL Interpreter. While the ASL interpreter is able to interpret from English to ASL, the Deaf Interpreter will be able to take the ASL interpretation and make the message more accessible for the Deaf Community, for those of varying language levels as the Deaf Interpreter is a native user of American Sign Language and has been trained in this process. A list of qualified Deaf Interpreters can be found [here](#).

In almost all 50 states across the country, Governors and local officials have had qualified ASL interpreters next to them at their Coronavirus public briefings, we believe this is also the "Oregon way" and ask that the State of Oregon, Multnomah County, and City of Portland follow suit.

We look forward to working together to create a community where events are accessible and inclusive for everyone. Please email us at vp@orid.org should you have any questions or comments.

Thank you for your leadership in this challenging time.

In Solidarity,
The Oregon Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf Board of Directors

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Included: [Deaf Interpreters of Oregon Updated March 2020](#)