

 **MINNESOTA**
**COMMISSION OF THE DEAF,
DEAFBLIND & HARD OF HEARING**

June 24, 2019

To Whom this May Concern,

The Minnesota Commission of the Deaf, DeafBlind & Hard of Hearing (MNCDHH) is launching an emergency communications accessibility campaign. We need your help to ensure that news coverage is inclusive to all Minnesotans, whatever their hearing status or primary language may be.

We are reaching out today to increase media awareness to the importance of communication equity while covering weather-related emergencies and other disasters. If an American Sign Language (ASL) interpreting team is provided during media briefings and updates, we ask you to voluntarily include them in the news gathering, editing, and reporting aspects of the story. Providing this will help share important information in a timely manner with a population that relies on these services to be informed, and most importantly, safe.

MNCDHH has posted a video link on our website with suggested screen framing of newsmakers and sign language interpreters. We also posted written guidelines on newsgathering using sign language interpreters and captioning to distribute to all newsroom employees. This can be found on MNCDHH's [webpage on accessible media](#).

The Facts:

Twenty percent of Minnesota's population has some degree of hearing loss, which may prevent them from obtaining potentially life-saving information.

- Nineteen percent rely on closed captioning to get the information they need.
- Just under one percent use ASL as a primary language. This is estimated to be approximately 50,000 Minnesotans.

Here is a recent example of how the media came up short in relaying important information to Minnesotans who use ASL as their primary language. On March 15, 2019, Governor Tim Walz called a Peacetime State of Emergency in response to the spring flooding. The Minnesota Department of Public Safety hired ASL interpreters so that the media briefing would be accessible to deaf Minnesotans.

One interpreter stood to the Governor's right, while the other interpreter was placed in a seated position in front of him. The two interpreters worked together to ensure the full message is interpreted accurately.

Alas, all local television crews covering the event zoomed cameras past the interpreter, framing the screen tight on the Governor and other state officials. The only part of the interpreter that the audience could see was an arm. For examples of this, visit [example 1](#) or [example 2](#).

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Advocating for communication access and equal opportunity with the
20% of Minnesotans who are deaf, deafblind and hard of hearing.

It can be surprisingly easy to overlook ASL interpreters. With this call to action and with the tools we are providing, we hope that you will include interpreters onscreen. Perhaps this will become a natural part of best practices adopted by all branches of the media. The information provided through an interpreter is critical and sometimes lifesaving.

We have reached out to the Minnesota Broadcasters Association and the Minnesota Newspaper Association with this message. Both organizations have expressed support and agreed to help us. We would love for you to support this cause as well. Your participation will make a difference in the lives of deaf, deafblind and hard of hearing Minnesotans.

We thank you in advance for your swift attention to this matter. We are available to work with you if you have any questions or concerns about accessible media reporting.

Sincerely,

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