

For Immediate Release

Contact: Robb Leer 612.701.0608



Minnesota Commission of Deaf, DeafBlind & Hard of Hearing Launches Emergency Communications Accessibility Campaign

*Statewide media Initiative serves as a call to action that emergency
communications are vital to all Minnesotans*

Saint Paul, Minnesota (June 25, 2019) - The Minnesota Commission of the Deaf, DeafBlind & Hard of Hearing (MNCDHH) announced today the launch of an emergency communications accessibility campaign. This campaign is being implemented to ensure that news coverage is inclusive to all Minnesotans, whatever their hearing status or primary language may be.

The purpose of this campaign is to increase media awareness to the importance of communication equity while covering weather-related emergencies and other disasters. The campaign encourages media to voluntarily include American Sign Language (ASL) interpreting teams during media briefings and updates, such as news conferences and other emergency related events. 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.

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

- 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.

This important campaign was created after a recent instance of how the media came up short in relaying important information to those Minnesotans who rely on ASL interpretive services. 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.

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 an example of this, visit <https://youtu.be/2jTIsAGO-u0> or https://youtu.be/Q_pwv5yRmMQ

As part of the campaign, MNCDHH has posted a video link on its' website with suggested screen framing of newsmakers and sign language interpreters. Written guidelines on newsgathering using sign language interpreters and captioning to distribute to all newsroom employees are also located on the site: <https://mn.gov/deaf-commission/about/media/accessible/>

With this call to action and with the tools provided, the MNCDHH hopes that the media will include interpreters onscreen to provide information through an interpreter that is critical and sometimes lifesaving.

For more information about this campaign and other initiatives of the commission please visit <https://mn.gov/deaf-commission/>

###