



Department of Human Services
311 West Saratoga Street
Baltimore MD 21201

FIA ACTION TRANSMITTAL

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**TO: DIRECTORS, LOCAL DEPARTMENTS OF SOCIAL SERVICES
DEPUTY/ASSISTANT DIRECTORS FOR FAMILY INVESTMENT,
FAMILY INVESTMENT SUPERVISORS AND ELIGIBILITY STAFF**

FROM: LA SHERRA AYALA, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, FIA
DEBBIE RUPPERT, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, MDH/OES

**RE: INTERPRETER SERVICES AVAILABLE FOR DEAF AND
HEARING-IMPAIRED PERSONS**

PROGRAM AFFECTED: ALL PROGRAMS

ORIGINATING OFFICE: OFFICE OF OPERATIONS

SUMMARY

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities in several areas, including employment, transportation, public accommodations, communications, and access to state and local government programs and services. As Maryland’s human services provider, the Maryland Department of Human Services (DHS) is required to provide reasonable accommodations to individuals with disabilities who come in contact with the agency to apply for public assistance.

This Action Transmittal (AT) discusses the communication needs of individuals who are hard of hearing by providing guidance and resources to meet their needs.

DEFINITION

A disabled individual is a person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits major life activities, has a record of such an impairment, or is regarded as having such an impairment. It is imperative that all individuals with hearing impairments or hearing loss (also referred to as “hard of hearing” or “Deaf”) are provided with accommodations. According to the National Association of the Deaf, “many individuals who are Deaf, or hard of hearing prefer the terms ‘Deaf’ and ‘hard of hearing’ because they consider them to be more positive than the term ‘hearing impaired,’ which implies a deficit or that something is wrong that makes a person

less than whole.”

COMMUNICATION RESOURCES

There are several resources to help you with communicating with customers who are hard of hearing. If you are not sure your LDSS has an account with one of the providers listed below in paragraph 2 of this section, please check with your Director or Assistant Director. Please note that American Sign Language (ASL) services are no longer available under the Maryland Department of Budget and Management’s Statewide Foreign Language Interpretation/ Translation Services (FLITS) 2019/2024.

1. The Maryland Relay Services

The Maryland Relay Services makes it easy for people who are Deaf and people who can hear to communicate with each other using a telephone to place and receive calls. This service is available for free by dialing 7-1-1 to make Relay calls. Visit Maryland Relay online at doit.maryland.gov/mdrelay for more information on the services provided.

How Does a Relay Call Work?

- The Relay user places a call through Maryland Relay, typically through the use of an assistive communication device. An individual may also initiate the call by dialing 7-1-1 or 1-800-735-2258.
- Relay Services must answer 85 percent of all calls within 10 seconds. Relay services must make best efforts to accommodate a user's requested communication assistant (CA) gender.
- A Maryland Relay Operator will greet the Relay user, provide his/her operator identification (ID) number, and request the number the Relay user wishes to call.
- If an FIA worker is the one initiating the call, the FIA worker gives the Relay Operator the area code and telephone number of the party they wish to call. If the worker has any further instructions, they may give that to the Relay Operator as well.
- The Relay Operator will process the call, relaying exactly what the specialized telecommunication equipment user is saying or typing to you, as well as exactly what the FIA worker is saying to the specialized telecommunication equipment user.
- The communication assistant must stay with the call for a minimum of 10 minutes to avoid disruptions to the user.
- The LDSS user will speak as he/she normally would. By law, the entire conversation is kept confidential.
- The Relay service must ensure user confidentiality and may not keep records of the contents of any conversation.
- The conversation is relayed in real-time.

2. American Sign Language

Each LDSS is required to have a Civil Rights Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) outlining how LAP provisions are implemented to meet customer needs, including ASL interpretation. Check with your Director or Assistant Director if you are not sure how to access a copy of your local SOP. If your LDSS does not have written SOPs and your office needs guidance in writing these up, DHS has a Language Access Policy (LAP),

which can be found on Google drive. If you do not have access to the LAP, please contact the FIA Policy Team by completing the [FIA Policy Information Request Form](#) found on Knowledge Base. The Policy Team will assist you with the resources needed for SOP development.

ASL is an entirely visual language that uses signs made by moving the hands combined with facial expressions and postures of the body. With its own grammar and syntax, ASL cannot be directly translated, word for word, to English and vice versa. ASL is the primary language of many North Americans who are Deaf or hard of hearing.

If ASL is the preferred language for a particular customer, please use the following resources below. Before contacting any of the providers listed, please check with your LDSS Director or Assistant Director to confirm that your jurisdiction has an account set up with the provider.

ASLI Interpreting Solutions (formerly American Sign Language, Inc.)

With a strong presence in New York, New Jersey, Maryland, Delaware, North Carolina, and Washington State, ASLI Interpreting is well-versed in all aspects of interpreting services. The company specializes in providing services to individuals who are Deaf, blind, or hard-of-hearing. The company's contact information is:

www.asli.com.

1-855-634-2754

interpreters@asli.com

iYellow Group (formerly TCS Interpreting, Inc.)

iYellow Group serves the Deaf, blind, visually impaired individuals. Its services include ASL interpretation and video. iYellow Interpreting advances equitable access through the provision language access, both onsite and remotely. iYellow Captions advances equitable communication access through transcription of the spoken word through video captioning and communication access real-time translation (CART) services, both onsite and remotely. The company's contact information is.

www.iyellowgroup.com

clients@tcsinterpreting.com

240-428-1820

Karasch Enterprises

Karasch Enterprises provides accessibility services including accommodations such as communication access real-time translation (CART). CART is open captioning or real-time stenography or simply real-time captioning. CART is the system that stenographers and others use to convert speech to text. In Maryland, this provider serves Baltimore City, and Baltimore, Carroll, Harford, Howard, Anne Arundel, Montgomery, Prince George's, Calvert, Charles, and St. Mary's counties. The provider's contact information is:

www.karasch.com

Phone: 800-621-5689

connect@karasch.com

Birnbaum Interpreting Services

Birnbaum Interpreting Services provides onsite sign language interpreting services nationwide to the Deaf and hard-of-hearing community for government agencies, healthcare providers, legal and courtroom situations, religious settings, business meetings, counseling and psychiatry, theater and entertainment, and other environments. The provider's contact information is:

www.bisworld.com

bisinfo@bisworld.com

301-587-8885

REQUIRED ACTIONS

1. Each LDSS must establish accounts with one or more of the service providers listed above to provide a full array of services to customers who are Deaf or hard of hearing if they do not already have an account. If an LDSS does not have an account with at least one of the service providers listed, they must establish an account within 60 days of the effective date of this AT. The service options must include onsite interpreting, video or remote interpreting, transcriptions, and onsite and video remote interpreting (VRI). If you already have the services discussed in this AT, you must review the agreement you have with the service provider carefully and ensure that your provider covers all the service areas set forth in this AT.
2. Once you have established accounts with providers, you must update your language access Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to outline the process for requesting services from each of your providers. Your updated SOPs must be submitted to the Family Investment Administration Office of Policy for review within 60 days of the effective date of this AT. Submit them to Labelle Hillgrove, Director of the Office of Statewide Policy Compliance and Customer Service Performance at labelle.hillgrove@maryland.gov.
3. If you added one or more providers or services, you must train your workers on how to access the new services within 30 days of the new services or providers being added.
4. Provide appropriate accommodations to Deaf or hard-of-hearing customers in accordance with this AT and your local SOP. You must narrate in the eligibility system the provider of this type of accommodation for every interaction with the target customers.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- The State of Maryland provides a wide range of additional services for the Deaf and hard of hearing, for additional information please the Governor's webpage, <https://odhh.maryland.gov/directory/#crisis-services>.
- AT: 17-12 Civil Rights Compliance
- AT: 12-15 Interpreter Services for Non-English Speaking Households and Households Containing a Hearing-Impaired Individual

INQUIRIES: Please direct policy questions to FIA Policy by completing the FIA Policy Information Request Form found on Knowledge Base as shown in the screenshot below or email to fia.policy@maryland.gov.

For systems questions, please email fia.bsdm@maryland.gov.

cc: DHS Executive Staff
Constituent Services
DHS Help Desk
FIA Management Staff
MDH Executive Staff
Office of Administrative Hearings