



RECOMMENDATION  
**Mayor's Committee for People with Disabilities**

Recommendation Number 20230310-4: A Recommendation to Require Certified ASL  
Interpreters to Be Dispatched to a Site with Deaf Survivors

WHEREAS, Austin's Deaf population is the 5th largest in the United States; and 20% of the State of Texas's entire deaf population resides in the Austin, Texas area; and

WHEREAS, a crowd of attendees attending the April 8, 2022 DeafNation Expo at the Palmer Events Center were injured after a vehicle had crashed into several people gathered near a food truck; and

WHEREAS, Deaf residents pay for City services including EMS, Fire, Police who are dispatched to a site after 911 is called through Video Relay Services; and

WHEREAS, American Sign Language and English are two distinct languages and an extensive use of figurative language in the English language may pose translation problems for Deaf individuals; and

WHEREAS, there has been a misconception that Deaf individuals can 'compensate' for being Deaf merely by writing on a piece of paper or even that they should have to; and

WHEREAS, American Sign Language does contain critical variations specifically based on facial expression which can accidentally become lost or changed through alternate methods of communication such as texting or writing on a piece of paper; and

WHEREAS, the present inability of attending City of Austin first responders to fully and immediately effectively understand all people in their preferred manner of communication can create critical gaps in understanding communications including during emergencies; and

WHEREAS, providing reliable and accurate means of communication between first responders and the people they interact with is essential so Deaf residents are fully included throughout Austin, Texas public life; and

WHEREAS, all Austin residents do have a right to receive reliable and appropriate first responder City of Austin services in the language which they best understand and are the native speakers of; and

WHEREAS, equity is not realized in the City of Austin unless first responders can first fully and clearly communicate with Deaf residents at a rescue site in their preferred language; and

WHEREAS, clearly explaining to Deaf individuals the City of Austin emergency services they are receiving in the language they best understand at a treatment site is a government which works for all; and

WHEREAS, clearly explaining to Deaf individuals the City of Austin emergency services they are receiving at a treatment site immediately following the accident is also open government.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT, The Mayor's Committee for People with Disabilities recommends that first responders in the City of Austin are required to have Certified American Sign Language Interpreters dispatched to a rescue site where the 911 dispatcher was specifically notified there are Deaf survivors.

Date of Approval: Friday, March 10, 2023

Record of the vote: Unanimous on a 6-0 vote

Attest: *Jacquelyn Alexander*  
(Staff Liaison, Jacquelyn Alexander)

For: Chair Jonathan Franks, Deborah Trejo, Robin Orłowski, Kathryn Broadwater, Jennifer S. Powell, and Micheal Fetonte.