Deaf People are Being Left Out of Public News Briefings about the Coronavirus Pandemic

Southern California Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (SCRID) is committed to promoting communication accessibility for Deaf community members during the coronavirus pandemic. Noting the varied linguistic needs of deaf individuals, we recognize the unique and native skills afforded by qualified Deaf interpreters which allow greater informational access to the Deaf communities at large. As such, SCRID encourages the use and uninterrupted visibility of qualified Deaf interpreters at any and all venues announcing vital health and/or emergency information to the public.

23 March 2020

A Letter to Government Entities and News Outlets:

As representatives of the interpreting profession, and in support of Deaf communities, the Southern California Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (SCRID) would like to thank those who have put forth invaluable work in providing American Sign Language interpretation of news briefings regarding the Coronavirus pandemic. We especially wish to thank those who have also recognized the need for constant visibility of the interpreter on the screen. Your efforts toward inclusion are critical in ensuring a large section of the public, and one which is already marginalized, has immediate access to updates that impact them and the lives of those with whom they come in contact. Your diligence in inclusion will have long lasting impacts on the safety and well-being of Deaf and hard of hearing individuals.

While many have shown a desire to include sign language interpreters during news briefings, the quality and success of these efforts has varied from clear, to incomprehensible, to nonexistent. Recognizing the critical need for accurate communication access, SCRID would like to provide some suggestions to help your updates effectively reach Deaf communities.

Language clarity and visibility are main considerations in this work. In the effort to provide clear and accurate communication accessible to the variety of language use amongst deaf individuals, it is becoming the national standard that a team of Deaf and hearing interpreters provide services during emergency and news briefings, the Deaf interpreter being on screen. Unfortunately, much of California has yet to catch up to this standard, resulting in critical information and potentially life-saving updates being absent or delayed for many Deaf people.
SCRID recommends the following measures to ensure clear and visible communication access for Deaf people:

- Request a Deaf and hearing interpreter team for all news briefings.
- For those who are not providing ASL access, consider guidelines under the Americans with Disabilities Act and other applicable laws, found at the resource link below, for providing communication access for the Deaf community.
- Ensure digital viewers can see the interpreter clearly on the screen at all times.
  - An alternative to a wide angle view that allows the interpreter to stand six feet from the presenter, yet often poses difficulty in clear visibility of the interpreter, is to dedicate one camera to the interpreter and insert this feed as video overlay. The interpreter may be filmed on site, or to accommodate physical distancing and public gathering limitations, they may be filmed/live-streamed from a separate location that has a live feed to work from.
  - For greatest visibility the interpreter should be constantly visible vertically approximately from the waist to a foot above the head, and horizontally approximately two feet on either side.
- Click here for additional resources

Please note, we are also encouraging interpreting agencies and interpreters servicing this area to adhere to the above standards of practice. Together, we can make great strides toward better inclusion of the Deaf community.

If you have any questions, please contact SCRID at coronavirus@scrid.org. We are happy to support you in ensuring Deaf people have access to the critical updates of our time.

Respectfully,

The Southern California Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf