

Columbus Police Division Directive	EFFECTIVE Jun. 15, 1994	NUMBER 10.07
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Sign Language Interpreters		



## I. Introduction

- A. Division personnel will occasionally encounter Deaf/Hard of Hearing (D/HH) individuals who require police services. The inability to effectively communicate due to a language barrier can be frustrating for both parties. During these encounters, Division personnel should remain calm, patient, and courteous as ensuring maximum communication ability between the Division and all segments of the community serves the interest of both.
- B. Division personnel should be aware D/HH individuals may sometimes make hand gestures and/or sounds when trying to communicate that could be misconstrued as acts of aggression. Division personnel should respond to each interaction based on their training and the situation.
- C. Division personnel are reminded that not all D/HH individuals can read lips. Additionally American Sign Language (ASL) is usually the primary language for D/HH individuals, not English.
- D. The purpose of this directive is to establish guidelines for Division personnel who provide services to or interact with D/HH individuals, consistent with law.

## II. Definitions

### A. American Sign Language (ASL)

A common visual language of standardized signs used by D/HH individuals that is specific to the United States. ASL has its own separate syntax, phonology, and morphology in and of itself which is not derived from English.

### B. Interpretation of ASL

The act of converting a spoken communication into a signed language or vice versa while retaining the same meaning.

### C. Ohio Relay Service 711

A free relay service that can be contacted by dialing 711 on any telephone. If a D/HH individual has a TTY or TDD device, the service will relay communications between the D/HH individual and hearing individuals.

### D. Qualified Sign Language Interpreter

An individual from a Division-contracted vendor who is able to effectively, accurately, and impartially, both receptively and expressively interpret using any necessary specialized vocabulary with D/HH individuals and Division personnel.

## E. Reasonable Accommodations

Any adjustments made by Division personnel to communicate with a D/HH individual in order to provide the same police services any other person would receive. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires that reasonable accommodations be provided for D/HH individuals, which can include any of the following: providing a pen and paper; using a personal computer; contacting the Ohio Relay Service; making hand gestures, sounds, or other means of communication; and providing a qualified sign language interpreter.

## F. Video Relay Services

Products available to D/HH individuals that provide free 24-hour service enabling users to place and receive calls through a professional ASL interpreter via a videophone and an internet connection (for example, Sorenson Communications, Purple, ZVRS).

Note: These services are to be used when parties are not at the same location provided the D/HH individual has the required equipment. A live qualified sign language interpreter must be used when parties are in the same location.

# III. Policy Statements

- A. Sworn personnel encountering D/HH individuals shall make all reasonable attempts to provide equitable and appropriate police services as needed.
- B. Sworn personnel encountering D/HH individuals shall provide reasonable accommodations to communicate based upon the preference of the individual as the situation dictates. ***Sworn personnel shall confirm the individual's preference and request an interpreter when desired.***
- C. Sworn personnel conducting a criminal or critical witness interview or interrogation of a D/HH individual shall use a qualified sign language interpreter from the Division-contracted vendor. Sworn personnel shall not use any individual as a qualified sign language interpreter who has a conflict of interest with the investigation.
- D. Sworn personnel may request an on-duty Division employee familiar with sign language or use other reasonable accommodations to:
  - 1. Gather preliminary information in exigent circumstances, or
  - 2. Provide assistance in situations not involving criminal or critical witness interviews or interrogations (for example, taking a report or mediating a dispute).
- E. Sworn personnel should only use a family member, friend, or bystander to gather preliminary information in exigent circumstances.
- F. Qualified sign language interpreters for the D/HH are required by a code of professional conduct to communicate to the D/HH individual any overheard conversation. Therefore, whenever a qualified sign language interpreter is

used for a criminal or witness interview or interrogation, sworn personnel shall avoid having private conversations in the presence of the qualified sign language interpreter.

Note: This also applies to the D/HH individuals' conversation. A qualified sign language interpreter will communicate to hearing individuals.

## IV. Procedures

### A. Division Personnel

1. Attempt to establish communications and determine the need to contact a qualified sign language interpreter or a Division employee familiar with sign language.
  2. When there is a need for a qualified sign language interpreter:
    - a. Contact Deaf Services Center (DSC), the Division-contracted vendor, to request a qualified sign language interpreter using one of the following methods:
      - (1) Email: [interpreting@dsc.org](mailto:interpreting@dsc.org)
      - (2) Phone (Business Hours): **(614) 841-1991, Option 2**
      - (3) Dispatch (After Hours): (614) 323-1754
    - b. Provide the following information about the request:
      - (1) Date and time
      - (2) Location of the assignment
      - (3) Name of the person in need of a qualified sign language interpreter
      - (4) Case number if available
    - c. Contact a sworn supervisor if guidance is needed regarding interpreting services.
    - d. When a qualified sign language interpreter from the Division-contracted vendor is used, complete a Sign/Foreign Language Interpreter Use Report, form A-31.104, and forward it to Public Safety Fiscal Management personnel.
- Note: The qualified sign language interpreter may present a verification form requiring a signature upon their arrival and/or departure.
- e. For criminal investigations:
    - (1) List qualified sign language interpreters as witnesses
    - (2) Collect written communications as evidence when appropriate
    - (3) Video record all parties involved during the interpretation when possible
  3. When there is a need for a Division employee familiar with sign language:
    - a. Contact Communications personnel and request an on-duty Division employee familiar with sign language to respond, if available.
    - b. Document the use of the Division employee familiar with sign language within the CAD system and on all appropriate paperwork.

**B. Division Supervisor**

1. When contacted, determine the need to call in a qualified sign language interpreter.
2. Ensure a Sign/Foreign Language Interpreter Use Report is completed as appropriate.