

## Communicating with Deaf Survivors

As advocates, one of our strongest tools is language. We use language to connect, encourage, and provide resources and information. When communication issues arise, it can be frustrating, but more importantly, it can be a barrier to services. American Sign Language (ASL) is the primary sign language used by deaf and hearing-impaired people in the United States and Canada. Finding a qualified ASL interpreter can be the key to effectively serving deaf victims. This bulletin will focus specifically on how to obtain the services of an ASL interpreter.



### Qualification

In 2005, Pennsylvania implemented Act 57, the Sign Language Interpreter and Transliterating State Registration Act, which states that “no individual may provide or offer to provide sign language interpreting or transliterating services, or hold himself as a qualified sign language interpreter or qualified transliterating or, use a similar title or designation, without being State-registered by the office in accordance with this act.”<sup>1</sup> There are eight exceptions to the law that include emergencies, internships, volunteers, national certification, etc.<sup>2</sup> To obtain qualification, interpreters must pass an examination approved by the national Registry of interpreters for the Deaf that tests knowledge and proficiency in interpreting and transliterating.

### ***As defined by Act 57***

***Interpreting. The process of conveying English in grammatically correct American Sign Language and the process of conveying American Sign Language in English.***

*Confidential communications. Except as provided by law, a sign language interpreter who acquires confidential information while interpreting or transliterating may not be required to disclose the information in any legal proceeding, trial or investigation before a governmental unit without the consent of the individual receiving interpreting or transliterating services. The sign language interpreter shall hold any legal*

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt?open=514&objID=552954&mode=2>

<sup>2</sup> lbet

*privilege that the individual receiving the services holds.*

Simply stated, the interpreter has the same confidentiality as the person they are interpreting for.

63 P.S. § 1725.1 (2006)

More About Interpreting

Most professional interpreters also belong to the national Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID). In order to be RID certified, interpreters must pass a proficiency test, and agree to follow a code of professional conduct<sup>3</sup> that is monitored through an ethical practices system. This system provides an opportunity for consumers to address concerns or file complaints regarding the quality of interpreter/transliterators services.

Interpreters view themselves as a communication tool—they must be able to listen to a person’s spoken words, inflections and intent and simultaneously render them into ASL. The interpreter must also be able to comprehend the signs, body language and intent of the deaf consumer and simultaneously speak them in articulate, appropriate English.

***Keep in mind that ASL is a unique combination of gestures and movements—it is not English translated into sign language.***

It is also important to know that interpreters are to be considered a communication tool when working, not a part of the conversation. When using a sign-language interpreter to facilitate communication, look directly at the Deaf person, and maintain eye contact with them. Also, talk directly to the person (‘What would you like?’), rather than to the interpreter (‘Ask her what she’d like.’).

### **Finding a Certified ASL Interpreter In Pennsylvania**

This database allows you to quickly identify sign language interpreters who meet the Pennsylvania registration requirements defined in Sign Language Interpreter and Transliterators State Registration Act. Act 57, 2006

There are 2 ways to best view the interpreters in the database:

1. Select “Statewide” under COUNTIES COVERED to view the list of interpreters willing to work anywhere in the state.
2. Select a specific county to narrow your search. Then select the interpreter’s name to view profile.

To search the database, go to:

<http://www.odhh.state.pa.us/Search/InterpreterSearch.aspx>

### **Using an ASL Interpreter**

While qualifying interpreters has many positive effects on ensuring professional,

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.rid.org/UserFiles/File/NAD\\_RID\\_ETHICS.pdf](http://www.rid.org/UserFiles/File/NAD_RID_ETHICS.pdf)

accurate and confidential interpreting services, Act 57 has caused a few issues. First, the quantity and availability of interpreters has decreased significantly. The qualification test is both difficult and expensive, and many former interpreters have not taken or passed it for various reasons. When quantity decreases, demand increases, and recently it has become more difficult to find interpreters and rates for interpreters have gone up.

On average in Pennsylvania, an interpreter booked through an agency costs \$50 from \$53 an hour and up. Rates can increase after business hours, on weekends, and when interpreters are needed without 48 hours notice. Many companies who contract with employers will require the interpreter to be hired for a minimum of two hours.

It is recommended that an interpreter is used whenever possible when working with a deaf person who uses ASL, unless the client has a different preference. Here are some tips on how to do this:

- Budget for “accommodations.” Funders love to see that you are thinking of accessibility! Then you have funding for the interpreter when the need arises.
- Form a relationship with an organization OR qualified interpreter and talk about ways to work together when a deaf individual needs services.
- Ask interpreters to join your volunteer program, staff and/or board of directors.

#### References:

1. <http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt?open=514&objID=552954&mode=2>
2. Ibet
3. [http://www.rid.org/UserFiles/File/NAD\\_RID\\_ETHICS.pdf](http://www.rid.org/UserFiles/File/NAD_RID_ETHICS.pdf)

#### Resources:

<http://www.rid.org>

RID is a national membership organization representing the professionals who facilitate communication between people who are deaf or hard of hearing and people who can hear.

[http://www.dli.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/office\\_for\\_the\\_deaf\\_hard\\_of\\_hearing/10371](http://www.dli.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/office_for_the_deaf_hard_of_hearing/10371)

Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry, Office of Deaf and Hard of Hearing

[http://new.vawnet.org/category/index\\_pages.php?category\\_id=966](http://new.vawnet.org/category/index_pages.php?category_id=966)

Special Collection from VAWNet: Violence in the Lives of the Deaf and Hard of hearing

<http://www.deafculture.com>

A site on Deaf culture