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Michigan Department of Civil Rights Outlines New Rules for Sign Language Interpreters in Michigan

Changes will have Wide-Ranging Impact on Institutions throughout the State

Lansing—The Michigan Department of Civil Rights today outlined new rules governing the certification and hiring of sign language interpreters in the state of Michigan, and encouraged businesses and institutions to be alert to the changes and seek help if needed to comply with the law.

The new rules, the first of which will go in to effect on Monday, July 7, will have a direct impact on any entity that is required to provide interpreters for deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing individuals in Michigan, including schools (preschools, K-12, and higher education), hospitals, courts, physicians' offices, law offices, and more.

The Michigan Department of Civil Rights is the agency charged with enforcing the rules governing sign language interpreters in Michigan.

"If you are required by law to provide interpreters, it is important that you understand the new rules," said Matt Wesaw, Director of the Michigan Department of Civil Rights. "While the rules make it easier for you to know that you're providing effective communication, they also make it easier for individuals to file complaints against you, and for the Department to determine when you're not."

Leslee Fritz, Deputy Director of MDCR, explained that the requirement for providing an interpreter, established in the federal Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Michigan's Persons with Disabilities Civil Rights Act, has not changed.

"What has changed is how an interpreter must be chosen after the need to obtain one is established," said Fritz. "The rules recognize that not all interpreters are created equal. An interpreter might be very effective in a courtroom, but lack the training needed to be effective in the classroom - and vice-versa."

Sign language interpreters in Michigan now will be required to have specific credentials and certifications to work in schools, medical settings, courtrooms and other places where the information being communicated may be technical or complex in nature, or where the level of harm that could be caused by miscommunication is highest.

MDCR's Division on Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DODHH) has published a chart detailing the various credentials sign language interpreters must have to provide accommodation in specific environments. Find the [Michigan Standard Levels Chart](#) on the DODHH website at www.michigan.gov/dodhh, in the box at the top of the page entitled "Interpreter Rules." In the same section you'll find the full set of rules entitled "[QUALIFIED INTERPRETER – GENERAL RULES](#)", a series of FAQs on topics related to the rules, and an Agency Report explaining the intent and foundational principles that guided the department in drafting the rules.

To file a complaint pursuant to the new rules which go in to effect on or after July 7, call the MDCR Division on Deaf and Hard of Hearing at (517) 507-5223, send an email to DODHH@michigan.gov, or fill out and mail or email the complaint form available on the DODHH website, www.michigan.gov/dodhh.

"These rules required compromise from all sides to finally get over the finish line," said Wesaw, "but these rules do not compromise the basic intent of the law or our mission at the Department of Civil Rights: assuring that every person, regardless of circumstance, is afforded an equal opportunity to work, live and learn in our state."

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