



• COMMUNICATION ACCESS CENTER •

for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

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## Frequently Asked Questions About Sign Language Interpreters

### **Why do I need to hire an interpreter?**

Both federal and state laws mandate the use of a Sign Language interpreter as an accommodation to facilitate effective communication. Specifically, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 requires that services must be accessible to all people, regardless of disability. Michigan's state law, PA 204 (2007) not only requires the placement of an interpreter, but that the interpreter must be certified at a specific level based on the setting and that they be listed on the state's database (<http://www6.dleg.state.mi.us/interpreter/>). Failure to provide an interpreter as an accommodation or providing an uncertified "interpreter" will result in heavy fines.

### **What is a "Qualified Interpreter"?**

Under Michigan law (PA 204), a "Qualified interpreter" means a person who is certified through the national registry of interpreters for the deaf or certified through the state by the division." Additionally the state requires that individuals holding a valid certification must be listed on the State's database. (<http://www6.dleg.state.mi.us/interpreter/>)

### **Why is a face-to-face/on-site interpreter necessary in certain settings?**

There are numerous reasons why a face-to-face interpreter is necessary to be present in many settings. Factors such as placement of parties involved in communication, consumer preference, and the unique communication needs of some consumers, are just a few reasons why such an interpreter would be necessary. Particularly in medical settings, the Joint Commission has identified in their standards that consumers must be asked their "preferred language" in order to have "effective communication" (The Joint Commission ). Face-to-face interpreters ensure instant communication access regardless of setting, unlike other methods that are dependant on technology and are prone to outages.

### **Who is required to pay for an interpreter?**

The ADA specifies that all public and private agencies that provide services to the general public and all employers with 15 or more employees must be accessible. Accessibility covers everything from wheelchair access to effective communication.

### **What is the role of an interpreter?**

CAC interpreters are professionals responsible for providing "functionally equivalent" messages from one party to another. Interpreters' scope of practice includes facilitating communication between consumers who do not use a common language. CAC interpreters are highly skilled, highly qualified, extensively trained field experts in interpreting American Sign Language.



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### **How do I know if an interpreter is certified in Michigan?**

Interpreters qualified to work in Michigan are listed on the state's online interpreter directory (<http://www6.dleg.state.mi.us/interpreter/>).

### **Why are two interpreters needed sometimes?**

Interpreting is both mentally and physically fatiguing. As time passes, an interpreter's ability to mentally process the message and effectively interpret diminishes. Additionally, interpreters are prone to repetitive stress injuries. The Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) has established standard practices regarding this issue that can be found at <http://www.rid.org/userfiles/File/pdfs/Standard Practice Papers/Team Interpreting SP P.pdf>

### **Confidentiality and HIPAA**

Interpreters operate under a strict Code of Professional Conduct (<http://www.rid.org/UserFiles/File/NAD RID ETHICS.pdf>). A fundamental tenet of this code of ethics is an adherence to confidentiality of all information attained during an interpreting assignment. This includes identity of consumers, location, and communication occurring between involved parties. Additionally many interpreters working in medical settings have additional training in the guidelines of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA).

### **How are Interpreters trained?**

Interpreters are highly trained individuals, studying not only the linguistics of American Sign Language, but also the theory of interpreting, professional ethics, Deaf culture and history. Once an individual graduates from an Interpreter Training Program (ITP), they are required to take a certification test. In Michigan, a candidate either applies to take the state exam (BEI) or the national exam (NIC) offered through the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID). In order for certified interpreters to maintain their current certification, they must complete continuing education units annually.