

# NEVADA COMMISSION FOR PERSONS WHO ARE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING

## Position on Policymaking for People who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing (D/HH)

**Scope:** The **Nevada Commission for Persons who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing (NVCDHH)** is established to provide advocacy on behalf of individuals who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing (D/HH), including the development of the Nevada State Plan for the Deaf (D), Hard of Hearing (HH), Speech-Impaired (SI), DeafBlind (DB), and Deaf Plus (D+). The Commission, established in 2017, works to promote full inclusion, equal access, and self-sufficiency of D/HH/SI/DB/D+ in the State of Nevada. As an advisory and advocacy body to the state, local government, policymakers, and stakeholders, the NVCDHH makes recommendations to address systemic barriers and to advocate for policies that enhance communication access, education, healthcare, employment, and community engagement. Statutory Authority: [NRS 427A.70](#).

For the purposes of this position statement the term “Deaf and Hard of Hearing (D/HH)” will be used throughout this document to include persons who are Deaf (D), DeafBlind (DB), Hard of Hearing (HH), Speech Impaired (SI), and Deaf or Hard of Hearing Plus (D/HH+).

### **Policymaking for People who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing (D/HH)**

Policymaking for individuals who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing (D/HH) must prioritize equitable access to communication, recognizing the linguistic and cultural diversity within the D/HH community. American Sign Language (ASL) is a distinct language with its own grammar, syntax, and structure, separate from English. While closed captioning in English is an essential accessibility tool, it does not fully meet the needs of ASL users. To ensure true accessibility, ASL interpretation must be incorporated into all aspects of policymaking and public communication.

American Sign Language (ASL) is not merely a translation of English but a unique language that many D/HH individuals rely on as their primary mode of communication. Closed captioning, while valuable, assumes proficiency in English, which may not be the case for many ASL users. Excluding ASL from public communication and policymaking processes creates barriers that undermine equal access and participation for D/HH individuals. Recognizing and addressing the distinct needs of ASL users is essential for creating truly inclusive policies.

Challenges with Sole Reliance on Closed Captioning often fail to convey the full meaning or nuance of spoken language, leaving ASL users at a disadvantage. Technical errors, inaccuracies, and lack of real-time synchronization in captions can further limit their effectiveness. Additionally, policymaking that relies solely on captioning overlooks the linguistic rights of ASL users and fails to address the diversity within the D/HH community. Relying exclusively on closed captioning does not account for the accessibility needs of all D/HH individuals, particularly those for whom English is not their primary language.

**The Nevada Commission for Persons who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing (NVCDHH) advocates for policies that ensure equitable access to communication and participation for the D/HH community.**

## **Policy Recommendations:**

### **1. Ensure ASL Interpretation in Policymaking**

- Require ASL Interpreters for all public meetings, legislative sessions, announcements by state officials, and policymaking processes to ensure full participation by D/HH individuals.
- Provide funding and resources to support the availability of certified ASL Interpreters for government communications.

### **2. Enhance Closed Captioning Services**

- Ensure captioning services are accurate, reliable, and synchronized in real-time as a supplementary accessibility tool.
- Offer captions in multiple languages when necessary to serve diverse communities.

### **3. Educate Policymakers on the Distinction Between ASL and English**

- Conduct training sessions for policymakers and public officials on the linguistic and cultural differences between ASL and English.
- Promote awareness of the importance of including ASL interpretation in all public-facing communications.

### **4. Collaborate with the D/HH Community**

- Involve D/HH individuals and advocacy organizations in the policymaking process to ensure that their needs and perspectives are adequately represented.
- Establish advisory committees to provide guidance on accessibility standards and implementation.

**Proposed Next Steps (Call to Action):** Policymakers must recognize the linguistic diversity within the D/HH community and take proactive steps to ensure that ASL users have equitable access to information and decision-making processes. Incorporating ASL interpretation alongside closed captioning will create a more inclusive society where all individuals can fully participate.

**Conclusion:** True accessibility in policymaking requires recognizing ASL as a distinct and necessary mode of communication for many D/HH individuals. By mandating and enforcing ASL interpretation, improving captioning services, and collaborating with the D/HH community, Nevada can lead the way in setting a standard for equitable and inclusive policymaking.