

NEVADA COMMISSION FOR PERSONS WHO ARE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING

(DRAFT) Position on the Identifying Challenges and Solutions Related to People who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing

Nevada has made significant progress in recent decades in providing services for persons who are deaf and hard of hearing, particularly through programs that focus on advocacy, education, and legal support. However, there remains an ongoing gap in access to certain services and resources that individuals in the deaf and hard of hearing communities require. In Nevada, the Commission itself has served as a critical voice in bringing attention to the issues facing this community, from advocating for access to American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters to pushing for improved health and safety accommodations. Despite this progress, challenges persist, and we recognize the need for continued, comprehensive efforts to enhance the lives of individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing.

The Nevada Commission for Persons who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Speech Impaired (the Commission) firmly believes that all individuals, regardless of hearing ability, deserve equal access to services, opportunities, and full participation in society. We believe that the deaf and hard of hearing communities should be supported through policies and practices that ensure inclusion, access to communication, and equal rights across all areas of public life—education, employment, healthcare, housing, and public services. It is essential to not only address the needs of these communities but to advocate for their rights and ensure they have the tools and resources to succeed.

Policy Recommendations:

With consideration of the identified challenges and gaps in services, the Commission proposes the following policy recommendations to address the needs of the deaf and hard of hearing communities in Nevada:

1. **One-Time Appropriation for Interim Study:** The Commission recommends a one-time appropriation to fund an interim study that will identify the challenges and solutions related to deaf services in Nevada. This study will include:
 - An evaluation of current services and their limitations.
 - A needs assessment from the deaf and hard of hearing communities to determine where services are lacking or could be improved.
 - A review of state policies, including those related to accessibility in education, healthcare, and public services.
2. **Outside Consultant to Develop Roadmap:** The Commission recommends engaging an outside consultant with expertise in accessibility and public service for the deaf and hard of hearing communities to develop a comprehensive roadmap for improving access to services. This roadmap will outline:
 - Immediate actions to address gaps in services.
 - Long-term strategies to ensure sustained improvements in accessibility and inclusion.
 - A focus on leveraging technology, increasing interpreter availability, and addressing physical and attitudinal barriers.
3. **Enhanced Funding for Deaf Services:** Advocate for increased funding to support

programs, services, and initiatives specifically designed for the deaf and hard of hearing populations in Nevada. This includes funding for communication access, interpreters, assistive technologies, and accessible healthcare services.

4. **Statewide Awareness Campaign:** Initiate a public awareness campaign that highlights the needs of the deaf and hard of hearing communities, aiming to educate the general public, service providers, and policymakers on the importance of accessibility and inclusion.

Proposed Next Steps (Call to Action): To move forward with these recommendations and build a more inclusive Nevada for individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing, the Commission calls for the following actions:

1. **Support for the Interim Study:** We urge the Nevada State Legislature and Governor to approve the one-time appropriation for the interim study to identify challenges and solutions related to deaf services. This study will provide essential data to guide future policy decisions.
2. **Collaboration with Experts:** We call for the engagement of qualified consultants who specialize in accessibility and public service delivery for the deaf community. Their expertise will help design a practical, actionable roadmap for improving services across the state.
3. **Increased Funding and Resources:** We urge the Nevada Legislature to prioritize funding for programs that provide direct services to the deaf and hard of hearing communities, ensuring they receive the support and resources needed to thrive.
4. **Partnerships with Community Organizations:** We encourage local governments, educational institutions, healthcare providers, and other relevant organizations to partner with the Commission in implementing the proposed roadmap and addressing systemic challenges to accessibility.

Conclusion: The Nevada Commission for Persons who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Speech Impaired is committed to improving the quality of life for individuals in the deaf and hard of hearing communities. We believe that by addressing the challenges that exist and focusing on sustainable solutions, Nevada can lead the way in providing a fully accessible and inclusive environment for all residents. Through thoughtful study, policy changes, and strategic collaborations, we can ensure that individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing have equal access to opportunities and services that allow them to live full and independent lives. The time to act is now—Nevada can and must do better.