

As you know, a funeral is a delicate service and a moment of vulnerability in a client's life. This is especially true when a client is denied access to communication during the funeral planning process.

Adjacent Space's mission is to promote and advocate for accessibility and equity for our Deaf, Deafblind and hard-of-hearing communities. Oftentimes we find ourselves identifying common barriers, which present themselves in different life situations, that are often overlooked or left unaddressed.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) covers a wide range of persons with disabilities, and the law strives to create an inclusive environment with certain guidelines depending on the facility type. Most importantly, ["the public accommodation provisions of the ADA are intended to provide access to public places and commercial facilities by individuals with disabilities, and to assure these individuals a level of service comparable to that afforded to individuals without disabilities."](#)

Deaf individuals are often left scrambling when faced with the death of family members or close friends. Because of the speed with which funeral services are often planned during what is already an emotional time, it can be very difficult for Deaf people to go through the process of grieving while also advocating for their own legal rights. Specifically, Deaf clients and funeral attendees who use American Sign Language as their primary mode of communication are often expected to provide their own interpreter or accommodation. Or, worse, their needs are simply overlooked and they are left unable to properly grieve, as a funeral service intends to provide space to do.

Because of this all-too-common occurrence, we want to ensure that all involved with this essential industry are aware that ["the Americans with Disabilities Act prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities by funeral homes. Under the ADA, funeral homes are required to provide effective communication to individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing."](#)

Here are some important, yet simple, steps that you can take to make sure that your Deaf, Deafblind and hard-of-hearing clients have their communication needs met during funeral preparations and services:

1. Arrange at least two contracts with American Sign Language interpreters (either directly with an individual interpreter or with an interpreting agency) before services are needed. See below for a list of local resources.
2. Arrange at least two contracts with CART service providers (Communication Access Realtime Translation) before services are needed. *(Please note that while CART is an appreciated and sometimes necessary service, in-person ASL interpreters are vastly preferred and will likely be requested by your ASL-using Deaf clients. Please feel free to reach out to us at Adjacent Space for more information on why this is usually the case.)*

3. Make sure you keep the lines of communication open and pay attention to what your Deaf client is requesting. It's your responsibility to make sure you have a clear understanding of what is needed.
4. Remember that your obligation to meet communication and access needs for your Deaf clients and attendees extends to any location, even offsite, where you are hired or which is part of the funeral or remembrance services.
5. And, of course, you may have a Deaf, Deafblind or hard-of-hearing client or attendee who would prefer other accommodations or no accommodations at all. We cannot speak for every single member of our community! All we can do is advocate for all community members to have an equal opportunity to grieve.

Above all, we urge you to treat your Deaf clients and community members with the same courtesy and thoughtfulness that you would with any other client. Not just because you're legally obligated to, but because it's the right and fair thing to do.

Thank you,

Angelica Dill & Trey Gordon
Co-founders, Adjacent Space

Resources:

Americans With Disabilities Act Lawyer Edward Zwilling, <https://www.adaadvocacy.com>

<https://funeraldirectordaily.com/funerals-and-the-americans-with-disabilities-act-ada/> — *Advice and thoughts from a Deaf funeral director*

<https://www.justice.gov/usao-ndga/pr/henderson-sons-funeral-home-agrees-resolve-alleged-violations-americans-disabilities> — *Department of Justice release about a court case against a funeral home that failed to provide ADA-required accommodations*

<https://nfda.org/resources/legal-compliance/other-compliance/americans-with-disabilities-act-ada-compliance-summary> — *A summary of the Americans With Disabilities Act, what it requires and what that means for funeral homes*

Please see the next page for a list of interpreter agencies and resources.

Below is a list of the interpreting agencies of which we are aware in the state of Alabama. Please know that as an organization we try to remain as neutral as possible; however, we aim to promote resources that provide accessible and equitable services to the community. We have recently begun to develop a roster through a survey for agencies to fill out, if they wish, in order for them to provide information about their services. You can find that information here:

<https://www.adjacent.space.org/local-interpreting-agencies>

Agency List

1. M&N Language Services — Birmingham, AL — Owned by Kenton Myers (ASL/Spanish/English Interpreter). This agency mainly provides interpreting services in medical settings, but can also provide services elsewhere.

M&N Language Services, LLC

888-224-9192

<https://www.mnlanguageservices.com>

info@mnlanguageservices.com

2. Sign Language Interpreting Services — Birmingham, AL — Owned by Kris Courson (ASL/English Interpreter). Provides interpreters for a variety of settings.

Sign Language Interpreting Services

205-343-4783

kris@slis.biz

3. Deaf Access — Huntsville, AL — Owned by Frances Smallwood (ASL/English Interpreter). Provides interpreters for a variety of settings.

Deaf Access

256-489-9606

<http://deafaccessinc.org>

scheduling@deafaccessinc.org

4. Bright Signs — Huntsville, AL — Owned by Dawn Vanzo (ASL/English Interpreter). Provides interpreters for a variety of settings.

BrightSigns Interpreting LLC

www.brightsigns.org

dawnvanzo@brightsigns.org

256.384.4141 text/voice

5. Signs of Excellence — Florida — Owned by Debbie Gibson (ASL/English Interpreter). Provides interpreters for a variety of settings. We are unsure of the presence or actual interpreter roster they have to be able to provide services. We do not see them used often.

6. Sorenson Community Interpreting Services — Birmingham, AL — This is owned and operated by Sorenson Video Relay Services. They have a department in their company that provides community services as well. Due to them having a Video Relay service center in Birmingham, they provide on site interpreting services to a few entities in the state.

7. Montgomery Interpreting Services — Montgomery, AL — We believe this owned by Belinda Montgomery (ASL/English Interpreter). We are unsure of how much activity she has of providing and maintaining a list of interpreters to contract out to the community.

8. Easter Seals of Central Alabama — We believe that Easter Seals provides minimal services to the community but are unsure of their capacity/full activity.

9. LBP Interpreting — We believe this is owned by Lori Pituk (ASL/English Interpreter) but we are unsure of how much activity she has of providing and maintaining a list of interpreters to contract out to the community.

Other — there are many national companies that provide services to a handful of states but they usually have large contracts with national companies. We generally do not recommend these larger agencies because they are unaware of local nuances, local needs, qualifications of interpreters and sometimes do not form reputable relationships with the community.

Please note that AIDB (Alabama Institutes for the Deaf and Blind) have stated to us that they are *not* an interpreting agency.

For a roster of individual interpreters, please visit <http://www.albit.alabama.gov/Licensee.aspx>.