Justice Department Reaches Settlement with Two Colorado Law Enforcement Agencies to Improve Communication with People Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

The Justice Department announced today that it has reached a cooperative settlement agreement with the Arapahoe, Colo., County Sheriff’s Office under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). This agreement is a companion to one reached on March 8, 2013, with the city of Englewood, Colo.

The Justice Department received complaints by individuals who are deaf, the Colorado Association of the Deaf and the Colorado Cross-Disability Coalition that officers for the city of Englewood and the Arapahoe Sheriff’s Office were not providing qualified sign language interpreters and other auxiliary aids and services when needed for effective communication with people who are deaf, including arrestees, victims and witnesses. The department’s complainants had also filed a lawsuit based on the same allegations in federal district court, *Lawrence et al. v. City of Englewood, et al.* While the department initiated investigations into the allegations against Englewood’s police department and the Arapahoe County Sheriff’s Office, and considered intervening in the private lawsuit, it also reached out to the parties to see if there were grounds for a cooperative resolution. All parties, including city of Englewood’s Police Chief John Collins and Arapahoe County Sheriff Grayson Robinson, expressed a commitment to ensure full compliance with the ADA.

The resulting settlement agreements include some model ways to ensure people who are deaf or hard of hearing are able to communicate effectively with law enforcement. For instance, officers for Englewood and Arapahoe County will use this pictogram to ask whether a deaf or hard of hearing person requests a sign language interpreter: [www.justice.gov/opa/images/sign-lang-small.gif](http://www.justice.gov/opa/images/sign-lang-small.gif).

Once the person expresses a need for a sign language interpreter, Englewood and Arapahoe have agreed to provide one under most circumstances, often within an hour of the request.

“People who are deaf or hard of hearing need to be able to communicate clearly with police and sheriff officers, whether they are crime victims, witnesses, arrestees, detainees, or just members of the public,” said Eve Hill, Senior Counselor to the Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division. “Citizens of the City of Englewood and Arapahoe County should be proud of their leaders. I also have to express gratitude to the Colorado Cross-Disability Coalition and the Colorado Association of the Deaf for their important work – and creative problem-solving-- in this area.”

“Englewood Police Chief John Collins and Arapahoe County Sheriff J. Grayson Robinson deserve our thanks and appreciation for their effort to provide effective models for Colorado’s – and the nation’s – law enforcement communities to work with deaf and hard of hearing citizens,” said U.S. Attorney for the District of Colorado John Walsh. “I strongly encourage law enforcement agencies throughout Colorado to follow their lead and adopt these tried-and-true measures. Doing so is simple, cost-effective, and will enhance law enforcement agencies’ protection of public safety while complying with the Americans with Disabilities Act.”
Under the settlements, the city of Englewood and Arapahoe County will each pay $35,000 to the private plaintiffs. In addition, they will enter into contracts with qualified sign language interpreters to ensure ready availability, train their staff on the ADA, appoint ADA coordinators, post signs indicating the availability of sign language interpreters and other auxiliary aids and services for people who are deaf or hard of hearing, provide text telephones and volume control telephones, modify their handcuffing policies for people who use sign language or hand writing to communicate, stock and provide hearing aid and cochlear implant processor batteries in the detention facility, and adopt policies consistent with the ADA. The private plaintiffs also signed these agreements, which resolved the Department of Justice’s investigations as well as the private lawsuit.

For more information on the ADA and law enforcement, visit www.ada.gov. Those interested in finding out more about these settlements or the obligations of law enforcement under the ADA may also call the Justice Department’s toll-free ADA information line at 800-514-0301 or 800-514-0383 (TDD), or access its ADA website at www.ada.gov. ADA complaints may be filed by email to ada.complaint@usdoj.gov.

Related Material:

- American Sign Language sign to indicate whether a sign language interpreter is necessary
- Arapahoe Settlement Agreement

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Civil Rights Division