

A Message from  
ILLINOIS ATTORNEY GENERAL  
**LISA MADIGAN**



As a law enforcement officer, you are committed to ensuring the safety of Illinois residents. While carrying out this important work, you may be faced with unique issues when interacting with people who are deaf or hard of hearing as victims, perpetrators, or witnesses.

Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), people who are deaf or hard of hearing are entitled to the same services law enforcement provides to anyone else. They may not be excluded or segregated from services, denied services, or otherwise treated differently than other people.

To guarantee the rights of people whose disability affects hearing, we must all make every effort to ensure effective communication. Both sworn and civilian personnel must provide appropriate assistance to the person who is deaf or hard of hearing, ranging from exchanging notes through a teletypewriter to providing a sign language interpreter.

I commend you for your continued work to safeguard Illinoisans and hope that you will find the information in this brochure helpful as you address crimes involving people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Lisa Madigan  
Attorney General



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**Law Enforcement Guide to  
Interacting with People Who  
Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing**



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## The Rights of Persons Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

To ensure the rights of persons who are deaf or hard of hearing, law enforcement agencies must:

- Provide the communication aids and services needed to communicate effectively with people who are deaf or hard of hearing.
- Give primary consideration to providing the aid or service requested by the person with the hearing disability.
- Provide communication aids and necessary services at no cost.
- When needed, provide interpreters who can interpret effectively, accurately, and impartially.

*Agencies are not required to provide personally prescribed devices such as hearing aids.*



## Communication Aids and Services

Officers may find a variety of communication aids and services useful in different situations:

- Speech supplemented by gestures and visual aids can be used in some cases.
- A pad and pencil, computer, or typewriter can be used to exchange written notes.
- A teletypewriter (TTY, also known as TDD) can be used to exchange written messages over the telephone.
- An assistive listening system or device designed to amplify sound can be used when speaking with a person who is hard of hearing.
- A sign language interpreter can be used when speaking with a person who knows sign language.
- An oral interpreter can be used when speaking with a person who has been trained to speech read (read lips). However, only about one third of spoken words can be understood by speech reading.

## Practical Suggestions for Effective Communication

The following are some basic guidelines to help ensure effective communication with a person who is deaf or hard of hearing:

- Before speaking, get the person's attention with a wave of the hand or a gentle tap on the shoulder.
- Face the person and do not turn away while speaking.
- Try to converse in a well-lit area.
- Do not cover your mouth or chew gum.
- If a person is wearing a hearing aid, do not assume the individual can hear you.
- Minimize background noise and other distractions whenever possible.
- When you are communicating orally, speak slowly and distinctly. Use gestures and facial expressions to reinforce what you are saying.
- Use visual aids when possible, such as pointing to printed information on a citation or other document.
- If someone with a hearing disability cannot understand you, write a note to ask him or her what communication aid or service is needed.