



## **Registro de Intérpretes para Sordos de Puerto Rico, Inc.**

PRESS RELEASE  
FOR IMMEDIATE PUBLICATION  
JULY 31, 2019

### ***Professional Interpreters Join the Deaf Community in Support of their Request for Access***

The professional sign language interpreter association, Registro de Intérpretes para Sordos de Puerto Rico, Inc. (RISPRI), demands that the government continue its efforts to comply with Law 266-2018 and compliance is not ignored amid the current political environment. Given the recent shifts in power in many of the government agencies, everyone can expect continuous, official government communication. As per the guidelines sent in the circular letter of July 8, 2019, all televised communication must be broadcast with the use of a professional sign language interpreter to abide with the right for equal access to the deaf community protected by the aforementioned law, the Americans with Disabilities Act, and the Rehabilitation Act.

"RISPRI believes that this legislation is much needed, as deaf and hard of hearing Puerto Ricans remain excluded from many services due to the absence of qualified sign language interpreters. We appreciate the good intentions; however, the legislation includes a requirement that sign language interpreters must have a license or a valid certification so that their expertise is recognized. That is problematic in Puerto Rico as there is no credentialing system that tests interpretation between the sign language used by deaf and hard of hearing Puerto Ricans and Spanish. This may have adverse effects for deaf and hard of hearing Puerto Ricans, and may also violate United States federal laws. Before there can be licensure, there must be a credentialing system in place to verify expertise. A certificate from a sign language program or even a degree in interpretation does not ensure that an interpreter is qualified. RISPRI will ensure that its involvement, alongside that of the deaf community, would be an instrumental part of the development, implementation, and maintenance of such a credentialing system. The design of a such credentialing system requires adequate funding and research." as explained by RISPRI's President, Marina Martinez.

The Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, Inc., a national membership organization of sign language interpreters in the United States, and the Board for Evaluation of Interpreters (BEI) in the state of Texas are the only two organizations that have a recognized credentialing system designed specifically for sign language interpreters testing the interpretation of American Sign Language (ASL) and English. The BEI also tests for ASL, English, and Spanish; however, one must first pass the English portion of the exam before sitting for the trilingual exam. None of the testing systems are ideal for use in Puerto Rico.

Eugenio Sastre, RISPRI's current Director of Deaf Community Relations, reaffirms "As is, this legislation will not resolve the problem of communication access to the Puerto Rican government, but may instead compound the problem by creating an industry of fake and ill-qualified interpreters, as evidenced in recent televised announcements, that will lead to mass miscommunications and run afoul of federal laws. Therefore, RISPRI respectfully asks that the government of Puerto Rico work with us and the deaf community of Puerto Rico to properly improve access for its deaf and hard of hearing residents. We stand ready to assist you in any way you need."

It is also important to note that sign languages are fully formed complex languages complete with phonology, morphology, syntax, and pragmatics. In addition, sign languages are not simple languages that can be learned quickly, and bilingual language fluency is a prerequisite to acquiring and mastering interpreting competence. The sign language used by deaf and hard of hearing Puerto Ricans is varied and unique to the island.

The Americans with Disabilities Act, 42 U.S.C. § 12101 et seq., and the Rehabilitation Act, 29 U.S.C. § 701 et seq., mandate that state governments provide equal access to its residents with disabilities. Regulations implementing Title II of the ADA, which applies to all aspects of state and local governments, including the government of Puerto Rico, and requires the covered entity to “take appropriate steps to ensure that communications with applicants, participants, members of the public, and companions with disabilities are as effective as communications with others.” 28 C.F.R. § 35.160(a). However, such effective communications with persons who use sign language requires the provision of qualified sign language interpreters, which is defined by regulations to be “an interpreter who, via on-site appearance or video remote interpreting service, is able to interpret effectively, accurately, and impartially, both receptively and expressively, using any necessary specialized vocabulary.” Id. § 35.104.

###

