



July 15, 2024

Hon. Raymond Sung Joon Cho  
Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility  
5<sup>th</sup> Floor, 777 Bay St.  
Toronto, ON M7A 1S5

Re: Removing Barriers to Communication for the Deaf Before 2025

Dear Honourable Raymond Cho,

We, the Canadian Association of the Deaf (CAD) and the Ontario Association of the Deaf (OAD), are writing to advocate for the implementation of a few changes to our current laws – to help you meet the goal of removing all barriers to people with disabilities in Ontario by 2025, as you have noted in the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act.

The first change is to establish a Video Remote Interpreting (VRI) subscription for American Sign Language (ASL) and langue des signes québécoise (LSQ) within ServiceOntario centres, both public and private in Ontario.

VRI allows organizations to connect with sign language interpreters virtually using a smart device with a camera and high-speed internet. With a VRI subscription, ServiceOntario would have on-demand access to ASL and LSQ interpreters, allowing Deaf and signing visitors to communicate in sign language without an additional wait time. The Accessible Canada Act recognizes ASL and LSQ as the primary languages of Deaf people in Canada.

As you are aware, Service Canada has taken commendable steps by providing this essential service to Deaf and signing Canadians. In partnership with Asign, all Service Canada Centres are now offering VRI services to support clients who use ASL and LSQ. Introducing VRI services to ServiceOntario is a crucial step in ensuring equitable access to essential government services for the Deaf and signing community.

The second change is to ensure that all first responders, police, and paramedics download a VRI or VRS – 911 application on their smart phones, so that when they meet a Deaf, Deaf-Blind, Hard of Hearing, or Deaf and disabled person who uses ASL or LSQ, they can gain access to a sign language interpreter with one press of a button on their screen. The service is already in place for Deaf people through the Canadian Administrator of Video Relay Service for Deaf Canadians, it is shameful that we don't have it available for our brave first responders who don't have time to struggle without interpreters during an emergency.

The final change is to ensure the democratic rights of all. I would ask that you consider proposing a change to the Municipal Election Act that would obligate every municipality to establish an Accessibility Advisory Committee to ensure that at least one of the all-candidate debates for Mayor or Reeve of the municipality is made accessible in ASL and LSQ, if appropriate. This will provide all citizens the right to question the candidates that wish to represent them; it will open the door for Deaf candidates who wish to participate in the election as a candidate. This obligatory will allow them to meet their fellow candidates, the voters, and the media – with interpreters in an accessible environment for all.

Providing these services will help the government make progress towards meeting its goal of creating a barrier-free Ontario by January 1, 2025. It is an enviable goal, and we applaud Ontario's leadership in accessibility legislation, now and then. We look forward to working together with the Government of Ontario to ensure the implementation of these services and the removal of these barriers for all Deaf Ontarians.

We kindly urge you to consider and prioritize this initiative, recognizing its potential to significantly improve communication and foster inclusivity within Ontario.

Sincerely,



Shawna Joynt  
President  
Canadian Association of the Deaf



Travis Morgan  
President  
Ontario Association of the Deaf

CC: Hon. Doug Ford, Premier of Ontario  
Hon. Todd McCarthy, MPP, Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery and Procurement  
Hon. Michael Kerzner, MPP, Solicitor General  
Hon. Paul Calandra, MPP, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing  
Hon. Caroline Mulroney, MPP, President of the Treasury Board, Minister of Francophone Affairs  
Michelle DiEmanuele, Secretary of the Cabinet, Head of the Ontario Public Service  
Meenu Sikand, Assistant Deputy Minister, Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Division  
David Lepofsky, Chair of Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Alliance  
Greg Essensa, Chief Electoral Officer, Elections Ontario  
Richard Belzile, Executive Director, Canadian Association of the Deaf  
Donald Prong, Executive Director, Ontario Association of the Deaf