

State Agencies Serving People who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

By: Mary Fitzpatrick, Principal Analyst
September 10, 2021 | 2021-R-0153

Issue

This report provides information on state agencies in other states that primarily serve deaf or hard of hearing people. It highlights those agencies that (1) act as a “gateway” to other state services or (2) have interpreters on staff who provide services in the community.

Summary

According to the National Association of State Agencies of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (NASADHH), agencies and offices in at least 35 states provide services to deaf and hard of hearing people. Many of these agencies provide information or referral services connecting deaf and hard of hearing people with services provided through other state agencies. These may include providing information on services available from other state agencies through websites, brochures, handbooks, or resource directories; providing case management services; and advocating on behalf of individuals or providing training or assistance with self-advocacy.

At least one state office has interpreters on staff that provide interpreting services in the community. Massachusetts’ Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing provides a statewide interpreter referral service that includes fulltime staff interpreters employed by the commission in addition to freelance interpreters. Generally, other states provide interpreting services in certain circumstances through vendor arrangements and contracts or provide funding for these services. Many agencies maintain lists, registries, or directories of interpreters who are available to the public for hire.

We also found that several states employ small numbers of staff interpreters who work for the office but do not generally provide services in the community. For example, Utah’s Division of Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing employs interpreters to provide services to the Utah State Office of Rehabilitation and under extenuating circumstances, as approved by a director.

State Offices and Commissions

NASADHH compiles [a list](#) of state agencies, offices, divisions, and commissions serving deaf and hard of hearing people. Table 1 below provides the following additional information on these offices:

1. relevant state statutes, if applicable;
2. examples of duties that may provide deaf or hard of hearing people with a gateway to other state services;
3. whether the agency has an interpreter unit on staff that provides interpreting services in the community; and
4. other duties related to interpreters or connections to other state agencies.

Information is not exhaustive and is based on agency websites and publicly available documents. Many agencies maintain a list, registry, or directory of freelance interpreters available for hire; this report focuses on interpreters employed by state agencies. The table does not describe services related to relay services or telecommunications equipment, among other things.

Table 1: Offices Serving the Deaf and Hard of Hearing: Gateway Duties and Interpreter Units

State (Statutes)	Agency	Agency Duties or Activities
Arizona (Ariz. Rev. Stat. §§ 36-1941 to -1978, as amended by SB 1092 (2021))	Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing	Gateway to other state services: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informs deaf and hard of hearing people of the commission’s available programs and activities and other services at all levels of government Interpreter unit: No Other Duties: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Makes recommendations to state agencies, political subdivisions, and institutions on how to meet deaf and hard of hearing peoples’ needs • Training and outreach events • Licenses American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters
Arkansas	Arkansas	Gateway to other state services:

State (Statutes)	Agency	Agency Duties or Activities
(Ark. Code §§ 20-14-801 to 20-14-809)	Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advocates by assisting people who are deaf, hard of hearing, or deaf blind with (1) understanding their rights or (2) accessing services <p>Interpreter unit: Yes, but for only for Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) clients</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Four staff interpreters provide services related to VR, the Independent Living Program, students attending the Arkansas Career Development Center, and Arkansas Rehabilitation Services Staff interpreters are available to VR clients for VR-related activities (e.g., job interviews) <p>Other duties:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides independent living services to those who meet income and hearing loss requirements (e.g., counseling, audiological and medical evaluation, independent living skills training, adaptive equipment, and interpreter services to support other planned services)
California (Cal. Welf. & Inst. Code §§ 10620 to 10629)	Department of Social Services' Office of Deaf Access (Deaf Access Program)	<p>Gateway to other state services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Directs clients to appropriate organizations and programs for social and health care needs Assists in crisis situations by intervening to ensure all public services (e.g., social, health, and safety) are available to deaf and hard of hearing people <p>Interpreter unit: No</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides interpreter services for clients and agencies statewide through 8 regional non-profit organizations No eligibility requirements Translates documents for deaf clients with low language skills <p>Other services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Counseling (e.g., spousal, child, or adult abuse) Independent living skills instruction Community education
Colorado (Colo. Rev. Stat. §§ 26-21-101 to -108)	Commission for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Deafblind	<p>Gateway to other state services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participates in Advocacy Coalition for Equality (ACE), a professional resource network serving deaf, hard of hearing, and deafblind people, that includes a workgroup on "one-on-one system navigation" to help people access resources and services without barriers <p>Interpreter unit: No</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hires vendors to provide legal auxiliary services (courtroom or legally qualified interpreting and Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) services for state courts and administrative proceedings) Provides, through a pilot program using selected agencies and freelance

State (Statutes)	Agency	Agency Duties or Activities
		<p>interpreters, interpreting services in rural areas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides, though a pilot program, interpreting services for selected state government agencies <p>Other services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advocate and make recommendations to facilitate, reform, or streamline community-based and general governmental services to deaf, hard of hearing, and deafblind communities Outreach and consultative services Deafblind services
Delaware	Office for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (within the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation)	<p>Gateway to other state services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides advocacy and support for people to obtain appropriate services or accommodations and directs them to other state, nonprofit, or private agencies as needed <p>Interpreter unit: No</p> <p>Other services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides information on various topics (how to obtain interpreter services or other aids, assistive technology, sign language classes, local and national news and events) Distributes Visor Communication Cards that inform police and other emergency personnel that a driver is deaf or hard of hearing Provides deaf culture awareness and basic sign language communication training to the public
Florida (Fla. Stat. § 413.271)	Coordinating Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing	<p>Gateway to other state services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides links to state, national, and private agencies serving deaf or hard of hearing people on its website <p>Interpreter unit: No</p> <p>Other services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recommends policies to address needs of deaf and hard of hearing people Provides technical assistance and resources to individuals, governmental agencies, and other organizations
Idaho (Idaho Code §§ 67-7301 to -7308)	Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing	<p>Gateway to other state services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides information and referrals and monitors consumer protection <p>Interpreter unit: No</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employs one interpreter specifically responsible for conducting outreach and working as a video relay interpreter <p>Other services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides interpreter directory lists and related information

State (Statutes)	Agency	Agency Duties or Activities
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advocates for equal access, increases awareness, and recommends public policies and programs Conducts research and reports to governor and legislature
Illinois (20 Ill. Comp. Stat. §§ 3932/1 to 3932/999)	Deaf and Hard of Hearing Commission	Gateway to other state services: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides information and referrals to statewide resources on advocacy, education, equipment, state employment, and ADA information Interpreter unit: No Other services: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promotes (1) education and awareness of legal requirements for effective communication and (2) independence for people with hearing loss Works to increase the quality and number of interpreters and CART providers through licensing, testing, mentorship, conferences, and directories
Indiana (Ind. Code §§ 12-12-7-1 to 12-12-7-5)	Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services (within Division of Disability and Rehabilitative Services)	Gateway to other state services: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides a resource directory including contact information for state and federal agencies Contracts with local community agencies to provide case management and community support services to improve independence Interpreter unit: No <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Administers a small fund (\$80,000 per year) for communications accommodations, including interpreting services, for people who are deaf or hard of hearing to access state government Other services: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Issues certificates and ID cards to interpreters and handles grievance procedures
Iowa (Iowa Code §§ 216a.111 to 216a.114)	Office of Deaf Services (within the Iowa Department of Human Rights)	Gateway to other state services: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides referrals to local, state, and national deaf and hard of hearing organizations, legal rights information, and access to government agencies Serves as a central information clearinghouse and resource for information Interpreter unit: No Other services: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assists with Americans with Disability Act (ADA) issues and policy development Provides information on how to hire interpreters Partners with local agencies and businesses to better serve deaf and hard of hearing people
Kansas (Kan. Stat. §§ 75-	Commission for the Deaf	Gateway to other state services:

State (Statutes)	Agency	Agency Duties or Activities
5391 to - 5397e)	and Hard of Hearing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides information and referral services and advocates for communication access <p>Interpreter unit: No</p> <p>Other services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Administers the statewide registration of all qualified interpreters Provides interpreter referral and coordination for state agencies, hospitals, courts, and other entities Provides safety communication visors to help law enforcement and emergency officials quickly identify drivers who are deaf or hard of hearing Provides public education on related topics
Kentucky (Ky. Rev. Stat. §§ 163.500 to 163.990)	Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing	<p>Gateway to state services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides information and referrals to agencies (e.g., brochures, fact sheets, and veteran resources) <p>Interpreter unit: No</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employs two staff interpreters By law, the commission may provide interpreter services if necessary (Ky. Rev. Stat. § 163.510) <p>Other services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coordinates interpreter and captioning services for state agencies Coordinates DeaFestival, a one-day event to celebrate the language, art, diversity, and talents of the deaf and hard of hearing community
Louisiana (La. Stat. §§ 46:2351 to 2356)	Commission for the Deaf	<p>Gateway to state services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides information on state and federal agencies <p>Interpreter unit: No</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides limited funding for interpreting services when resources are unavailable or when the ADA is not applicable <p>Other services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides support service provider (SSP) services to deafblind residents to help them perform everyday activities
Maine (Me. Stat. tit. 26 §§ 1413 to 1413-E)	Division for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Late Deafened	<p>Gateway to state services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides information, referral, and advocacy Publishes a handbook on resources (a guide to services for people who are deaf or hard of hearing) <p>Interpreter unit: No</p> <p>Other services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides deaf identification cards and vehicle placards

State (Statutes)	Agency	Agency Duties or Activities
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides a listing of legal interpreters • Promotes policies and legislation to improve services
Maryland (Md. Code, State Govt. §§ 9-2401 to 9-2407)	The Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing	<p>Gateway to state services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Serves as an information clearinghouse on needs and issues affecting deaf and hard of hearing people • Works to increase access to educational, health, and social opportunities • Works with state, federal, and private agencies to promote economic development for deaf and hard of hearing people • Provides a network for services provided by state and federal programs serving deaf and hard of hearing people <p>Interpreter unit: No</p> <p>Other services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expands the “deaf ecosystem” to support current and aspiring deaf and hard of hearing business owners to increase economic empowerment by reducing underemployment and unemployment • Develops a state policy framework to address fraudulent and unqualified interpreters in the state • Collaborates with state services, agencies, and programs to improve services
Massachusetts (Mass. Gen. Laws ch. 6 §§ 191 to 199)	Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing	<p>Gateway to state services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides information and referral services to people with requests related to communication access, including during interactions with other state government agencies and services <p>Interpreter Unit: Yes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides a statewide interpreter referral service that includes fulltime staff interpreters employed by the commission in addition to freelance interpreters <p>Other services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides public policy recommendations, advocacy, and technical assistance • Provides or ensures provision of specialized services, including case management for children
Michigan (Mich. Comp. Laws §§ 408.201. to 408.210.)	Division on Deaf, Deafblind and Hard of Hearing	<p>Gateway to state services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assists people who are deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing with referrals to public or private agencies dealing with their specific problems or concerns <p>Interpreter unit: No</p> <p>Other services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helps state agencies and public find qualified interpreters • Assists other state agencies to assure that the needs of people who are deaf,

State (Statutes)	Agency	Agency Duties or Activities
		deafblind, and hard of hearing are considered in policy development
Minnesota (Minn. Stat. §§ 256c.21 to 256c.30)	Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services Division	<p>Gateway to state services:</p> <p>Provides information and referrals and helps people navigate services systems so they can continue to live independently</p> <p>Interpreter unit: No</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides sign language interpreter services through a community-based, state grant funded program serving greater Minnesota for (1) 12-step recovery groups and (2) funerals <p>Other services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Administers a mental health program to provide culturally affirmative mental health therapy and counseling in ASL to adults who are deaf and have mental illness
Mississippi (Miss. Code §§ 37-33-171 to -173)	Office on Deaf and Hard of Hearing	<p>Gateway to state services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides links to government offices and resources <p>Interpreting unit: No</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> One staff interpreter <p>Other services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seeks to improve interpreter services by increasing the number and certification level of interpreters and maintaining a list of qualified interpreters Provides community outreach, training, and education on related issues Conducts activities related to public awareness and advocacy, including advising the legislature
Missouri (Mo. Rev. Stat. §§ 161.400 to 161.412)	Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing	<p>Gateway to state services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Duties include establishing a network for effective communication among the deaf adult community and promoting the establishment of certain telecommunication services where needed <p>Interpreter unit: No</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> One staff interpreter position is listed as vacant <p>Other services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintains quality of interpreting services and develops a system of state certification Promotes development of services for deaf adults (e.g., shelter homes, independent living, and skill training facilities)
Nebraska (Neb. Rev. Stat. §§ 71-	Commission for the Deaf and Hard of	<p>Gateway to state services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mental health advisory committee ensures full access to comprehensive mental health, alcohol, and drug abuse services for deaf and hard of hearing

State (Statutes)	Agency	Agency Duties or Activities
4720 to 71-4732.01)	Hearing	<p>people</p> <p>Interpreting unit: No</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One staff interpreter in addition to interpreter review board members <p>Other services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hearing aid banks • Interpreter licensing
New Hampshire (N.H. Rev. Stat. §§ 200-C:18 to -C:20)	Program for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing	<p>Gateway to state services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Works with consumer groups to ensure quality services and serves as an information and referral source for the state on the subject of deafness and hearing loss <p>Interpreting unit: No</p> <p>Other services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participates in screening interpreters and maintains a list and fee schedule • Assists in developing legislation affecting deaf or hard of hearing people
New Jersey (N.J. Rev. Stat. §§ 34:1-69.1 to -60.17)	Division of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing	<p>Gateway to state services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deaf and hard of hearing specialists can access information, attend meetings in a supportive role, and provide other resources <p>Interpreting unit: No</p> <p>Other services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintains a list of certified interpreters for referrals • Sensitivity training • ASL services for children ages 0 to 5
New Mexico (N.M. Stat. §§ 28-11b-1 to -11b-4)	Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing	<p>Gateway to state services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides one-on-one individual advocacy services to clients to resolve issues related to communication barriers, including coordinating services through other agencies <p>Interpreting unit: No</p> <p>Other services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acts as an information clearinghouse for interested individuals, organizations, agencies, and institutions • Provides self-advocacy training, among other trainings
North Carolina (NC ST §§ 143b-216.30 to -216.39)	Division of Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing	<p>Gateway to state services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides information and referral services, including to local and state resources (e.g., Employment Security Commission and Division of Motor Vehicles) • Provides information and follow up for government programs (e.g.,

State (Statutes)	Agency	Agency Duties or Activities
		<p>Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Medicaid, and Medicare)</p> <p>Interpreting unit: No</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides communication access for healthcare appointments through a partnership with the state's Medicaid agency • In certain situations, regional centers will sponsor interpreters for Narcotics Anonymous or Alcoholic Anonymous meetings or certain groups that request interpreter services on an as-needed basis <p>Other services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocates and consults on ADA issues, equal access, and reasonable accommodations
Oregon (Or. Rev. Stat. § 410.740)	Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services	<p>Gateway to state services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offers advice and referrals to people experiencing barriers • Receives complaints on difficulties getting ASL interpreters for state agency appointments <p>Interpreting unit: No</p> <p>Other services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partners with public services and programs to make them more accessible • Coordinates public agency (state and local) requests for interpreters
Pennsylvania (43 Pa. Cons. Stat. §§ 1461 to 1466)	Office for the Deaf & Hard of Hearing	<p>Gateway to state services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocates for people with hearing loss who are not receiving proper services from government or private agencies • Distributes information and answers questions on relevant issues • Refers people to appropriate organizations, serving as a liaison <p>Interpreter unit: No</p> <p>Other services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintains a database of interpreters who meet state requirements • Contracts with SSPs to assist deafblind people
Rhode Island (R.I. Gen. Laws §§ 23-1.8-1 to -1.8-5)	Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing	<p>Gateway to state services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides a “welcome packet” that includes information on social services agencies and programs for deaf and hard of hearing individuals • Operates an information and referral program, including an information clearinghouse <p>Interpreting unit: No</p> <p>Other services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administers an interpreter referral service • Operates the Emergency and Public Communication Access Program to

State (Statutes)	Agency	Agency Duties or Activities
		<p>provide education, training, consulting, and other assistance to state and local agencies and other organizations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Operates a lending library and equipment lending program
<p>Tennessee (Tenn. Code § 71-4-2101 to - 2109)</p>	<p>Council for the Deaf, Deaf-Blind, and Hard of Hearing</p>	<p>Gateway to state services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acts as bureau of information for deaf, deaf-blind, and hard of hearing people to state agencies and public institutions providing healthcare, employment, vocational, education services, resource sharing, and emergency services <p>Interpreting unit: No</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Six grantees operate under performance-based contracts to provide pro bono interpreting services, among other things <p>Other services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Self-advocacy training Make recommendations to, and advise, the legislature
<p>Texas (Tex. Hum. Res. Code §§ 81.0055 to 81.021)</p>	<p>Office for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services</p>	<p>Gateway to state services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides hearing loss information, advocacy assistance, and referrals to other sources of information Interpreter unit: No Department of Health and Human Services contracts with interpreters for services Administers a Special Needs Funds program to provide communication services, including interpreting, for one-time events; funds available on a first-come, first served basis Contracts for “last resort communication services” for situations where certain federal requirements do not apply <p>Other services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Operates a donation-funded summer camp, “Camp Sign,” for children Provides driver visor cards
<p>Utah (Utah Code §§ 35a-13-501 to - 504)</p>	<p>State Division of Services to the Deaf and Hard of Hearing</p>	<p>Gateway to state services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides case management services to people who are deaf or hard of hearing to identify and obtain needed services from federal, state, or county programs Provides information and referral services <p>Interpreter unit: No</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff interpreters provide interpreting services to the Utah State Office of Rehabilitation and under extenuating circumstances, as approved by a director <p>Other services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Certifies, regulates, and maintains a directory of interpreters

State (Statutes)	Agency	Agency Duties or Activities
Virginia (VA Code §§ 51.5-106 to -115)	Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing	<p>Gateway to state services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides information and referrals on resources for hearing loss and trains state and local agencies on effectively interacting with people who are deaf or hard of hearing <p>Interpreter unit: No</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contracts with interpreters for services in state agencies and provides information to private entities and the public to locate and secure qualified interpreters <p>Other services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides emergency preparedness information in accessible formats
Washington (Wash. Admin. Code Ch. 388-818, in particular §§ 388-818-0050 & -0060)	Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing	<p>Gateway to state services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides case management to people with hearing loss, their family members and the community, including coordinating other services with nonprofits and government agencies and addressing issues related to education, employment, early intervention, mental health, housing, and alcohol and substance abuse <p>Interpreter unit: No</p> <p>Other services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Makes sign language interpreter services available through a cooperative purchase agreement
West Virginia (W. Va. Code §§ 5-14-1 to 5-14-11)	Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing	<p>Gateway to state services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides links to governmental resources, including the Department of Motor Vehicles, Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, and Birth-to-Three programs <p>Interpreting unit: No</p> <p>Other services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintains information about education, group home facilities, employment, vocational training, and health and mental health services Maintains an interpreter registry, coordinates state testing system for interpreters
Wisconsin (Wis. Stat. §§ 46.293 to 46.298)	Office for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing	<p>Gateway to state services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Helps with accessing various benefits, including Medicare, Medicaid, Low-Income Tax Credits, veterans' benefits, and unemployment benefits <p>Interpreting unit: No</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> One staff interpreter By law, through the Department of Health Services, may provide funds to reimburse interpreters in certain situations (e.g., emergencies and medical

State (Statutes)	Agency	Agency Duties or Activities
		services) Other services: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides referrals to community services and resources • Provides trainings and consultations on accessibility

MF:kc