



Janet T. Mills
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MAINE
DEPARTMENT OF LABOR
BUREAU OF REHABILITATION SERVICES
DIVISION OF VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION
150 STATE HOUSE STATION
AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333-0150

Laura A. Fortman
COMMISSIONER

May 3, 2019

Dear Colleague:

The Division for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Late Deafened at the Maine Department of Labor's Bureau of Rehabilitation Services, along with Disability Rights Maine Deaf Services, are together writing to let you know that the Legal Interpreting Fund was recently repealed in the Governor's budget. This fund had paid for interpreters for private lawyers and advocates needing to meet with their Deaf clients and those resources will now be used to assist Deaf Maine citizens in ensuring access to effective communication. As of July 1, 2019 this fund will no longer be available; however, appointments up to June 30, 2019 would be processed if the invoices are received by July 31, 2019.

Note: <http://legislature.maine.gov/doc/2880>, pages 93 and 94.

Attorneys are required, under state and federal law, to provide qualified interpreters when needed to represent their clients.

Many have long believed that it was odd for attorneys to receive free interpreters, paid for by the taxpayers, while other professionals have been required to hire interpreters. Access to justice is vitally important of course, but by establishing and maintaining this fund, we may have inadvertently sent a message to some Maine lawyers that interpreters are readily available to them at no cost. The message we want to send is that effective communication is vital for all of us when we engage a lawyer, a doctor or any other professional and that Deaf people are entitled to services that create effective communication.

Disability Rights Maine Deaf Services will continue to represent Deaf Maine citizens who have trouble accessing interpreter services, will continue to train our communities on Deaf rights and will work in partnership with the Deaf Advocacy Group, the Division for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Late Deafened, the Commission for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Late Deafened and our many other partners, to ensure access to effective communication. The Division for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Late Deafened will continue to prepare and continually update a directory listing all qualified legal interpreters in the State. When requested by an agency or court, the Division for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Late Deafened shall furnish the agency or court with the directory. provide information to the public, including state agencies and individuals who work with interpreters, regarding the qualifications necessary to become a qualified legal interpreter.

Sincerely,

Kim Moody
Executive Director, Disability Rights Maine

Terry Morrell
Director, Division for the Deaf,
Hard of Hearing & Late Deafened