

Arkansas Deaf and Hard of Hearing Leadership 2025 Arkansas Legislative Platform

Establish and fund a sustainable Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in Arkansas.

An Arkansas Commission Serving the Deaf and Hard of Hearing should be established and adequately funded to ensure that all Deaf, Hard of Hearing, or DeafBlind Arkansans have support for communication access. The Commission would strive to ensure communication access to receive information easily and effectively in all aspects of their lives, especially their health and well-being. Additionally, all public and private entities would have a resource for information about effective communication with Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Deafblind people.

- ✓ To promote greater accessibility to services for the Deaf and hard of hearing by developing awareness, communication access, and training programs to agencies, organizations, decision makers, service providers, businesses and the general public.
- ✓ To advocate for the promotion of accessible services and consult on removing barriers to full participation.
- ✓ To provide training and technical assistance on various topics such as technology, accommodations, culture, legal, education, effective communication and other topics related to deaf and hard of hearing issues.
- ✓ To develop a data collection strategy relative to compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act and deaf and hard of hearing access issues.
- ✓ To conduct ongoing needs assessments to identify gaps and recommend changes to improve the quality of living for the deaf and hard of hearing people in Arkansas.
- ✓ To work with federal, state, and local organizations and agencies to improve the quality of life for deaf and hard of hearing persons in Arkansas.
- ✓ Study the possibility of coordinating sign language interpreter services and accommodation technology between agencies and organizations with the goal of centralizing services.
- ✓ To function as funder of last resort when interpreter services or accommodations have been refused to a Deaf, Hard of Hearing or DeafBlind person.



This document is available online at: tinyurl.com/enhancing-access

Arkansas Facts, Figures and Definitions: Hearing Loss

It is estimated Arkansas there are 183,703 adults in Arkansas with hearing loss. An Arkansas Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing is needed.

According to the Center for Disease Control, “6.1% of U.S. adults are deaf or have serious difficulty hearing.” For Arkansas, that statistic translates to 183,703 adults who are Deaf or hard of hearing. *(Based on the 2020 US Census: Arkansas population of 3,011,524.)* (Sources: [US Census Bureau: Arkansas](#) and [CDC: Hearing Difficulties Among Adults](#))

Complexity

Hearing Loss is **not** a simple “one solution fits all” disability. Hearing loss is a lived experience that impacts communication in profound ways. Effective communication strategies for people with hearing loss vary. Language preferences, including American Sign Language (ASL), communication approaches, technology preferences and other factors will impact how effective communication is established.

Deaf

People who are Deaf and communicate with American Sign Language (ASL) frequently need a qualified ASL-English interpreter to have access to effective communication in important interactions. The interpreter is also needed by those agencies, businesses, and community entities who have an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) obligation to provide effective communication.

Hard of Hearing

People who are hard of hearing may have some residual hearing and may use speech reading and hearing amplification devices. Included in this group are adults who acquire hearing loss later in life (sometimes referred to as “late-deafened”). Late Deafened individuals may need assistance in learning about strategies and technology that can be of benefit to them. Because the onset of their hearing loss was later, they may not be connected with groups or professionals who can provide guidance and information.

DeafBlind

Both Deafness and Blindness are disabilities that impact access to information. Deafness and hearing loss impedes access to auditory information and Blindness impedes access to visual information. A person with any combination of significant hearing and vision loss would be considered DeafBlind. Support Service Providers (SSPs) are trained to provide individualized support to ensure effective communication and equal access for people who are DeafBlind.

Training and Advocacy

The American with Disabilities Act (ADA) mandates effective communication be provided by public accommodations and state and local governments. However, many organizations and leaders in key positions don't have the knowledge to plan for effective communication mandated by the ADA. A Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing can support state and local governments, community organizations, and businesses with training and technical assistance.

Why Services, Advocacy and Education Are Needed: A Real Example

Bob (not his real name) was a Deaf man in his 60's. He used American Sign Language (ASL) to communicate. American Sign Language is significantly different in structure than spoken or written English. Written English was not an effective communication method for Bob.

Bob had no contact with his family. No one in his family ever learned sign language. After a lifetime of misunderstandings and communication difficulties, there was a complete parting of the ways. Bob was without family connection or support.

Bob had a small circle of Deaf friends (who communicate in ASL) and had income from Social Security. Bob received a letter from the Social Security that he did not understand. Unfortunately, it was a letter informing Bob that Social Security was ending his benefits. Because written English didn't provide effective communication for Bob, he did not understand the letter. Soon after receiving it, he noticed that no social security check had been deposited in his account.

Bob needed someone who could communicate directly with him in American Sign Language. Bob needed an advocate who would understand that written English was a significant barrier for Bob. Bob needed an advocate that could understand the seriousness of the situation, and work with him in a sustained way to get to the bottom of the problem with Social Security payments. Bob needed advocacy to ensure he had qualified interpreters. And the workers at Social Security needed training from qualified staff relative to the Americans with Disabilities Act and Effective Communication.

If Bob lived in a state with a Commission for the Deaf, those services would be in place. In Arkansas, there is not a Commission for the Deaf or significant service agency serving Deaf people.

Individuals connected with the Deaf community did the best they could to patch in support and interpreting services where they could. (None of that help was part of their existing job descriptions). They did the best they could for Bob on an ad hoc, behind the scenes basis.

For many, many months Bob got confusing and contradictory decisions and reversals from Social Security. There were more confusing letters in written English, which was not effective communication for Bob. It was constantly confusing and intensely stressful.

Bob died from a cardiac event before the Social Security issue was ever resolved. This is just one example of many that illustrates why Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing is needed.

Communicating with Deaf and Hard of Hearing Constituents

An Arkansas State Legislator should be able to arrange for a Qualified Sign Language Interpreter or other accommodation to meet with Deaf or Hard of Hearing Constituents. State legislative bodies (including state senators and members of the house of representatives), have an ADA obligation to communicate equally effectively with people who have communication disabilities as they communicate with people without disabilities. Each state establishes their own processes to ensure compliance with the ADA. For more information about Title II and Effective Communication, please visit this Department of Justice website: [ADA Requirements: Effective Communication | ADA.gov](#)

How can a State Legislator communicate via telephone with a Deaf Constituent?

All Arkansans have access to Relay Services at no cost. This enables people who are hearing to communicate via phone with people who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, DeafBlind or those with a Speech Disability. People who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, DeafBlind or have a Speech Disability can use relay services to place and receive calls with hearing people.

If you are Hearing: Placing a Call:

- Have the area code and phone number of the person you are calling ready.
- Dial 711, or 800-285-1121 (English), 866-656-1842 (Spanish)
- A Relay Operator will answer.
- Provide the area code and telephone number of the person you wish to call to the Relay Operator.
- They will connect the call. If needed, they can also explain the process to you.

If you are Hearing: Receiving a Call from a Deaf Constituent:

- Don't Hang Up!
- When you answer your phone and hear, "Hello, this is Arkansas Relay...", please don't hang up! You are about to talk, through a relay operator, with a person who is Deaf, Hard of Hearing, DeafBlind or has a Speech Disability.

Video Relay Services (VRS)

- Many people who are Deaf now use Video Relay Services, which allow for communication to happen visually through an interpreter, instead of the text communication that is the foundation of traditional Relay Services.
- A hearing person may access Video Relay Services if given the phone number by a Deaf person who subscribes to this service. The number you were given will connect you with a VRS operator, and they will connect to the Deaf subscriber.
- A Video Relay Services Interpreter/Operator (sometimes called a Communication Assistant) will be a qualified interpreter who will relay the conversation back and forth between the parties.

Text Messages and Email

- Text Messaging and Email can be effective in communicating brief messages with your Deaf constituents.

Proposed Priorities for a Commission for Deaf, Hard of Hearing and DeafBlind Arkansans

Advocacy

- Provide systems-level advocacy for access, inclusion, and barrier removal for Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and DeafBlind individuals, according to applicable legislation.
- Conduct individual-level advocacy to ensure equal and effective communication access.

Education & Outreach

- Provide education/outreach to agencies, organizations, and businesses to improve service delivery to Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and DeafBlind Arkansans.
- Provide education and outreach to Deaf, Hard of Hearing and DeafBlind people to increase knowledge of legal rights, available technologies, resources, and opportunities to increase quality of life.

Coordination

- Create an entity to bring stakeholders together, maximize service provider communication, and reduce service redundancy while improving braided workflows.

Accountability

- Create an electronic system to track services and record community issues identified or addressed.
- Create reports that demonstrate accountability.
- Use data for future planning of services and effort.

Estimated Budget: Year One

Below is a rough estimate of the minimum budget required for the first year of operation of a commission with the recommended staffing.

Personnel

- Director: 100% FTE @ \$90,000 + 25,200 (28% fringe) = \$115,200
- Interpreter/Access Specialist: 100% FTE @ \$60,000 + \$16,800 = \$76,800
- Deaf Outreach Specialist: 100% FTE @ \$60,000 + \$16,800 = \$76,800
- Hard of Hearing Outreach Specialist: 100% FTE @ \$60,000 + \$16,800 = \$76,800
- Training/Policy/Reporting Specialist: 100% FTE @ \$60,000 + \$16,800 = \$76,800
- Administrative Assistant/Budget Specialist: 100% FTE @ \$45,000 + 12,600 (28% fringe) = 57,600

Total personnel: 480,000

Professional Services

- Consultation Services: 28 days onsite and distance consultation @ \$1500/day = \$42,000
- Interpreting and Captioning Services: \$75/hour for 800 hours = \$60,000
- Information Technology Services: 120 hours @\$50.00 per hour = \$6,000

Total Professional Services: \$108,000

Staff Training and Professional Development

- **Hearing Loss Association of America Annual Conference (4 days 2 travel days):**
The mission of HLAA is to open the world of communication to people with hearing loss by providing information, education, support and advocacy. Conferences have a focus for professionals as well as hard of hearing people, families, friends, coworkers, teachers, hearing health care providers, industry, government, and others.
- **National Association of the Deaf (NAD) Conference (6 days 2 travel days):** The National Association of the Deaf has a broad focus including the following: early intervention, education, employment, health care, technology, telecommunications, youth leadership, and more. The NAD also carries out its federal advocacy work through coalition efforts with specialized national deaf and hard of hearing organizations, as well as coalitions representing national cross-disability organizations.
- **American Association of the DeafBlind (4 days -2 travel days):** The American Association of the DeafBlind is the only consumer organization of, by and for deaf-blind people. The mission of AADB is to ensure that all deaf-blind persons achieve their maximum potential through increased independence, productivity, and integration into the community.
- **State Commission for the Deaf (in a Sister State) Meeting for Commission Set-up and Mentoring (4 days-2 travel days)**

4 Professional Development events – One staff member at each. Total to cover airfare, airport parking, registration, per diem and other costs. \$10,436

Total Staff Training and Professional Development: \$10, 436

Supplies

- 4 computers with software and peripherals (Printer/scanner, backup drive for each):
\$3000 each = \$12,000
- 1 LCD Projector, screen and replacement bulbs = \$1250
- Paper, pens, printer cartridges and other general office supplies: \$2500
- Mountable monitor for presentations = \$3000
- Office Furniture: \$20,000

Total Supplies: \$38,750

Telephone Services – Cell Phones

- 6 I-Phones @ \$700 each = \$4,200
- Cell Service Plan: \$37.50 per month – 6 lines for 12months = \$2,700

Total: Telephone Services/Cell phones: \$6,900

Facility/Rent

Unknown at this time

Total (minus Facility/Rent): \$644,086.00

How Might a Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing be Funded in Arkansas?

North Carolina has a funding model that could inform funding in Arkansas. In North Carolina, funds from their telecommunications surcharge are used to support communication services for people who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing. There has been much discussion in the Arkansas Deaf Community about Arkansas considering adopting the North Carolina model to fund needed services. As of June of 2023, Arkansas has \$5,933,451.27 in unused funds that could be dedicated to needed services.

Below is some additional information about the use of telecommunication surcharges. There is also an appendix included that can inform this strategy further.

In Arkansas, the collected surcharge is divided into three categories. (As we understand it).

Arkansas Relay Services

The Arkansas Relay Services contract with T-Mobile is funded by this surcharge.

arkansasrelay.com

Telecommunications Access Program

The Arkansas Telecommunication Access Program (TAP) is funded by this surcharge.

[Arkansas Rehabilitation Services: Telecommunication Access Program](#)

Available Uncommitted Funding

As of June 30, 2024, there was \$6,485,864.67 in unused funds.

[DF&A Revenue Division: Telephone Surcharge \(PDF\)](#)

North Carolina Similar Legislation

This link will take you to a copy of the North Carolina Legislation: [North Carolina Telephone Relay Services Legislation \(PDF\)](#)

Within that North Carolina legislation, there is one section that establishes needed services:

(d1) The Department of Health and Human Services shall utilize revenues from the wireless surcharge collected under subsection (i) of this section to support the Division of Services for the Deaf and the Hard of Hearing, in accordance with G.S. 143B-216.33, G.S. 143B-216.34, and Chapter 8B of the General Statutes.

Other States

Other states have a variety of methods for funding services for Deaf, Hard of Hearing and DeafBlind people. Links to those service structures can be found on the following pages.

How Other States Serve Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and DeafBlind People

States with Commissions for Deaf and Hard of Hearing People

State	Commission Name	Website
Arizona	Arizona Commission for the Deaf and the Hard of Hearing (ACDHH)	acdhh.org
Colorado	Colorado Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (CCDHH)	ccdhhdb.colorado.gov
Iowa	Deaf Services Commission of Iowa (DSCI)	hhs.iowa.gov/initiatives/community-advocacy/deafservices
Illinois	Illinois Deaf and Hard of Hearing Commission (IDHHC)	idhhc.illinois.gov
Kansas	Kansas Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (KCDHH)	kcdhh.ks.gov
Kentucky	Kentucky Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (KCDHH)	kcdhh.ky.gov
Louisiana	Louisiana Commission for the Deaf (LCD)	ldh.la.gov/page/LCD
Massachusetts	Massachusetts Commission for the Deaf & Hard of Hearing (MCDHH)	mass.gov/orgs/massachusetts-commission-for-the-deaf-and-hard-of-hearing
Minnesota	Commission of Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing Minnesotans (MNCDHH)	mn.gov/deaf-commission
Missouri	Missouri Commission for the Deaf & Hard of Hearing (MCDHH)	mcdhh.mo.gov
Nebraska	Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (NCDHH)	ncdhh.nebraska.gov
New Mexico	New Mexico Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (NMCDHH)	cdhh.nm.gov
Rhode Island	Rhode Island Commission on the Deaf & Hard of Hearing (RI CDHH)	cdhh.ri.gov
West Virginia	West Virginia Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (WVCDHH)	dhhr.wv.gov/cdhh

States with a Significant Service Agency for Deaf and Hard of Hearing People

State	Commission Name	Website
California	California Office of Deaf Access (ODA)	cdss.ca.gov/deaf-access
Florida	Florida Coordinating Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (FCCDHH)	floridahealth.gov/provider-and-partner-resources/fccdhh
Idaho	Idaho Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (ICDHH)	cdhh.idaho.gov
Indiana	Indiana – Deaf & Hard of Hearing Services (DHHS)	in.gov/fssa/ddrs/rehabilitation-employment/deaf-and-hard-of-hearing
Maryland	Governor’s Office of the Deaf & Hard of Hearing (ODHH)	odhh.maryland.gov
Maine	Division for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing & Late Deafened	maine.gov/rehab/dod
Michigan	Division on Deaf DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing (DODDBHH)	michigan.gov/mdcr/Divisions/doddbhh
Minnesota	Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services Division (DHHSD)	mn.gov/deaf-hard-of-hearing
Mississippi	Office on Deaf and Hard of Hearing (ODHH)	odhh.org
North Carolina	Division of Services for the Deaf and the Hard of Hearing (DSDHH)	ncdhhs.gov/divisions/services-deaf-and-hard-hearing-dsdhh
New Jersey	New Jersey Division of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DDHH)	nj.gov/humanservices/ddhh
Pennsylvania	Office for the Deaf & Hard of Hearing (ODHH)	pa.gov/en/agencies/dli/departments-offices/health-and-disabilities/office-of-the-deaf-and-hard-of-hearing.html
Tennessee	Tennessee Council for the Deaf, Deaf-Blind and Hard of Hearing (TCDDBBHH)	tn.gov/humanservices/ds/councils-and-committees/tcddbhh.html
Texas	Office for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services (DHHS)	hhs.texas.gov/services/disability/deaf-hard-hearing
Virginia	Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (VDDHH)	vddhh.virginia.gov

State	Commission Name	Website
Vermont	Vermont Department of Disabilities, Aging, and Independent Living Services for Deaf, Hard-of-Hearing, Deafblind (DAIL)	dail.vermont.gov/services/programs/deaf-hard-hearing-deafblind
Washington	Washington Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (ODHH)	dshs.wa.gov/altsa/odhh
Wisconsin	Wisconsin Council for Deaf and Hard of Hearing	dhs.wisconsin.gov/dhhcouncil
Wisconsin	Wisconsin Office for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (ODHH)	dhs.wisconsin.gov/odhh

How Advocacy and Communication Creates Solutions

Advocacy is often needed to find solutions supporting Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Deaf-Blind individuals in achieving equal access, reasonable accommodations, and effective communication in the community. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and other legislation is designed to ensure equal access to Americans with disabilities. Advocacy for effective communication is a key element within a Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing.

Communication Support

Effective communication is specific to the individual who has the hearing loss. A Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing will have qualified staff capable of responding to the variety of communication needs of Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and DeafBlind people. Included in the support may be:

- Qualified sign language interpreters
- Tactile or up-close interpreters
- Support Service Providers (SSP) for people who are DeafBlind
- Assistive listening devices
- Real-time captioning
- Television captioning and decoders
- Computer assisted note-taking
- Oral interpretation
- Cued speech transliteration
- Information and Referral Services
- Interpreter of Last Resort

There are many instances when an agency, organization, or business need a reliable source of information about Effective Communication and disability related legislation. Below are community examples where advocacy can be helpful:

- Employment Security Commission
- Social Security Administration
- Division of Motor Vehicles
- Medical Facilities
- Local police departments
- Social Security
- Food stamps
- Medicaid
- Medicare
- Legal separation or divorce
- Child support
- Income taxes
- Financial planning
- Estate planning.
- Banking

A Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing will be engaged in providing training and educational opportunities to the local communities. This may include the topics below:

- ADA and civil rights information
- Aging issues and information
- Assistive Listening Technology
- Telecommunications Technology
- American Sign Language (ASL)
- Deaf Culture
- Employment issues and concerns
- Government programs
- Hearing loss
- How to use an Interpreter
- Legal rights

Thank you for your consideration of this proposal. If you have any questions, please contact me. My contact information is on the first page of this document.