

Madam Chair or Senator Hardy: What folks have brought to my attention is that during the Governor's press conferences, the remote ASL interpreter and captioning are not always appearing on the broadcast, thus leaving the deaf, deafblind, and hard-of-hearing community without the information in a timely manner.

The American Community Survey (ACS) indicates that approximately 70,000 individuals in Vermont experience hearing loss. However, when we delve deeper, we find an estimated 400-500 individuals who identify as Culturally Deaf and up to 40 individuals who identify as DeafBlind. It's important to note that "DeafBlind" is a broad term, and not everyone may identify with this label. Some individuals might prefer to describe themselves as hard of hearing with low vision or as Deaf with complete blindness, among other possibilities.

I wish to ask for you to ensure two simple solutions, the implementation of which will improve accessibility during the Governor's press conferences and any future announcements regarding natural disasters:

1. Picture-in-Picture (PIP): PIP functionality allows for simultaneous display of an interpreter in American Sign Language (ASL) alongside the main video feed. By enabling PIP, viewers who require ASL interpretation will be able to watch the press conferences while following the interpreter's signing. The biggest hurdles are that each TV station operates independently. It would help streamline the level of accessibility.
2. Visible Captioning: Allows individuals to read the spoken content in real-time, ensuring they receive accurate and timely information. Visible captions should be clear, properly synchronized with the audio, and easily readable for optimal accessibility regarding what platform (Facebook, YouTube) is being used.

The Accessibility Subcommittee under DHHDB Advisory Council explained in great depth along with recommendations and visual aids- for you to understand what needs to happen in our state. We see it already being practiced in others and we should follow their examples. I hope that you can enable these fixes to better serve all Vermonters! Vermonters should not have to go on a scavenger hunt to locate that one channel that has all the accessibility features. Often times, they aren't always available until much later. For instance, I wasn't able to create a video in ASL sharing useful resources until midway through the flooding recovery period. FEMA assisted with certain context that needed to be shared. That should happen within a matter of days, not weeks.

Every individual has a different checklist in their mindset when it comes to equal accessibility.