

RESOURCE GUIDE FOR CONTRACT MCD06 ASL INTERPRETERS AND ALL OTHER STAKEHOLDERS In Response to the COVID-19 Emergency



Massachusetts Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (MCDHH)



Address

600 WASHINGTON STREET
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02111

Message from the Commissioner

Dear colleagues,

In response to concerns brought forward from MassRID and the interpreter community through our MCDHH Interpreter and CART Referral Services, I formed a team to create an instant and reliable resource that is dedicated to Massachusetts Contractor Interpreters during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. It is my hope that you find this resource very beneficial. Please do feel free to share this with your colleagues.

MCDHH is augmenting the services offered under Contract MCD06: American Sign Language Interpretation and Transliteration Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the Governor's State of Emergency. These augmented services are expected to continue through the existing term of MCD06 and then become part of the next contract during the renewal period of July 1, 2021 through June 30, 2024. MCD06 contractors accepting private jobs not covered by the MCD06 contract are encouraged to consider including some or all of the service elements in this document when negotiating agreements with non-MCD06 requesters.

Our goal is to empower the interpreting community to navigate and cope with current challenges that we have never experienced nor encountered in several past generations. MCDHH, like many of us, will do the best we can to ensure that communication access is not compromised in the process. Once again, I cannot express my gratitude enough for your courage and willingness to step-up to the challenge of accepting on-site and remote assignments during these unprecedented times.

In good health,

Steven A. Florio
MCDHH Commissioner

Guidance for Referral of On-Site and Video Remote Interpreting Services



The MCDHH Interpreting Services Department will remain operational during the COVID-19 crisis. Referral of on-site assignments will continue. In addition, MCDHH is offering alternatives to on-site services by encouraging interpreters to offer VRI services through agreements with requesters. In this way, MCDHH can maintain its goal of providing communication access to the Deaf, Hard of Hearing, Deaf-Blind, and Late-Deafened community and supporting local work for local interpreters.

Referral Protocol for Video Remote Interpreting Services



Referral will:

1. Accept VRI requests and make note of the platform that the requester is utilizing.
2. Consumer names (so to be identified on screen), requester contact and billing contact are required for all requests.
3. Available assignments will be offered to interpreters stating that request is VRI and said platform identified (Webex, Zoom, etc.)
4. Referral will share any information provided by requesters to assigned interpreters, prior to assignment.
5. Assigned interpreters are responsible for contacting requesters for links, format of the assignment and any additional information needed.

Please note: Interpreter responsibilities for contacting the requester remain the same as set forth in the MCD06 document. All other interpreter - requester communications specified in the MCD06 document should be followed.

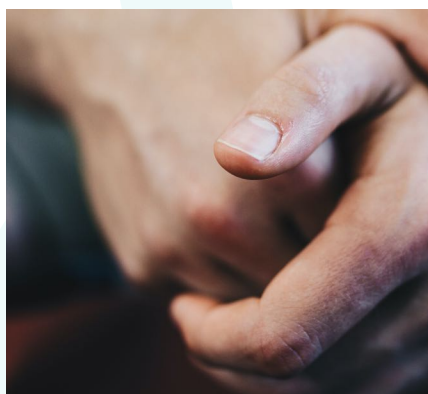
Guidance on Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)



Interpreters may still be referred for on-site assignments where Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is needed for safety reasons. Due to the high demand of PPE from hospitals and other medical facilities, there is a shortage of PPE available. MCDHH is taking steps to procure PPE for interpreters, such as clear masks and gloves, in the event they are needed. Please communicate with referral specialists if PPE is needed for your assignments. For general guidance on strategies to optimize the use of PPE, visit:

<https://www.mass.gov/info-details/covid-19-guidance-and-directives#health-care-professionals-&-organizations->

Working with Deaf-Blind Consumers



Deaf-Blind consumers are disproportionately impacted by the events of COVID-19, as these individuals may require on-site, in person interpreting services. MCDHH recognizes the challenges that come with providing communication access to Deaf-Blind consumers through tactile means and the need for Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). MCDHH is partnering with the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind (MCB) to ensure that the Deaf-Blind community is able to receive the communication access services they need throughout the duration of the COVID-19 crisis.



Video Remote Interpreting services can be provided on a desktop or laptop computer or tablet. These are the technical requirements for Zoom, but may be applicable to other videoconferencing platforms that are available on the market. For more information, visit:

<https://canvas.du.edu/courses/79407/pages/zoom-technical-requirements>

Recommended Video Remote Interpreting Technical Specifications

System Requirements

An internet connection. Ethernet cable is the top choice for any video conference platform (VRS industries use this method). Wi-Fi with strong upload and download speeds (at least 25 Mbps speed) may be manageable. Wireless depending on the locations and reception area, 3G and 4G/LTE will be able to carry video feeds. Check your Internet bandwidth using [Speedtest](#).

A microphone – built-in to your computer or USB plug-in or wireless Bluetooth.

Built-in headset jack from laptop or desktop. Even if your laptop or desktop has speakers, you must plug in a headset so that the sound from the speakers does not cause an echo in the Zoom meeting. Any headset with a 3.5mm plug will plug in.

Microphone/Headset

A USB headset with microphone and earphones is recommended.

Webcam

One which is built-in to your computer or one that connects to your computer via USB.

Supported Operating Systems

Mac OS X with MacOS 10.6.8 /(Snow Leopard) or later, Windows 10, Windows 8 or 8.1, Windows 7, Windows Vista with SP1 or later, Windows XP with SP3 or later, Ubuntu 12.04 or higher, Mint 17.1 or higher, Red Hat Enterprise Linux 6.4 or higher, Oracle Linux 6.4 or higher, CentOS 6.4 or higher, Fedora 21 or higher, OpenSUSE 13.2 or higher, ArchLinux (64-bit only).

Supported Tablet or Mobile Devices

iOS and Android devices, Windows Surface PRO 2 running Win 8.1, Windows Surface PRO 3 running Win 10, Blackberry devices.

Supported Browsers

Windows: IE7+, Firefox, Chrome, Safari5+Mac: Safari5+, Firefox, ChromeLinux: Firefox, Chrome.

Recommended Environmental Considerations for VRI Services at Home

Suggestions on how to ensure that VRI services at home are delivered in a professional manner.



Lighting

Avoid any kind of bright light source directly behind you, regardless of whether it is a light or a window. This will cause what's called 'backlighting' and it will create a halo around your head and make your face appear darker, rendering a harsh and high contrast picture. Lighting behind you will also draw attention to whatever is in the background that could potentially be distracting.

Amazon has an extensive array of lighting equipment and stands. Look for daylight-balanced LED dimmable lights with stands for maximum flexibility, if you have space. Here is an example:

https://www.amazon.com/dp/B07B9X3BF1/ref=cm_sw_r_em_apai_B-mDEbHYFY7JW

If your space is limited, on-device lighting is a viable alternative:

https://www.amazon.com/dp/B07JBB6L22/ref=cm_sw_r_em_apai_ainDEbCN9S9AE

You will need to mount the above near the device, a small tabletop tripod is a necessity.

https://www.amazon.com/dp/B00D76RNLS/ref=cm_sw_r_em_apai_wnnDEb24TTEET

Recommended Environmental Considerations for VRI Services at Home

Proportionality

This refers to the size of your head/upper body within the picture that the viewer sees. Try to position the camera/device so that everything from the top of your head to a little above your waist is visible. Including more than is necessary makes your picture smaller and your signing harder to understand, especially when you are fingerspelling or working with somebody of whom you know that they depend to some degree on speech reading.

Background

This goes without saying, but it should be plain and uncluttered. Avoid setting up your camera or device where you are likely to have distracting elements or where other household members walk by. Anticipate your daily routine and set up someplace where you are not likely to be disturbed or distracted either by somebody walking behind you, or somebody walking in front of you. You can search Amazon or B&H photo for a wide variety of collapsible or muslin photographic backgrounds that you can use to place behind you to create a uniform experience even if you have to move to another location within your home.

If you are unable to find a 'natural' location in your home, like a table, a laptop floor stand may be what you need:

https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0017285TS/ref=cm_sw_r_em_apavnDEbDKZ7RCR

Sound

The hearing person for whom you are interpreting can hear everything going on at your end unless you mute the microphone when you are not actively voicing. If you cannot keep noise to a minimum, familiarize yourself with how to quickly mute and unmute your end of the conversation. If you have not already done so, invest in good quality headphones, preferably with noise cancellation capability, that have an included microphone function. This will at least allow you to screen out any background noise happening in your environment. [continued on next page]

Recommended Environmental Considerations for VRI Services at Home

Camera angle

It is imperative that the interpreter test how she/he will appear to the consumer and verify that the image is optimal for the job before proceeding. If it all possible try to set up your camera or device in such a way that you appear to be looking at somebody from eye level. This is after all how we normally communicate, and if you happen to be sitting at a low table using a laptop and you tilt the camera and screen upward, it will be an extremely unflattering angle of you. The Deaf person will feel like they are a looking up at you, which is not a natural angle. It should be easy for most to find some books or boxes if nothing else is at hand, to raise the device to eye level.

If you are unable to find a 'natural' location in your home, like a table, a laptop floor stand may be what you need:

https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0017285TS/ref=cm_sw_r_em_apai_avnDEbDKZ7RCR

Please be mindful that everyone's situation is going to be slightly different, but paying attention to these basic matters - along with wearing the typical appropriate clothing - should greatly improve the video remote interpreting experience for consumers.

Clothing

Attire should be an appropriate color, keeping to solid colors and avoiding patterned tops. A general rule of thumb for video interpreting is to wear a shirt that is an opposite hue of your skin, i.e. darker skin tones should wear lighter clothing, and lighter skin tones should wear darker clothing. Wearing the color white should be avoided as this will create a glowing effect on camera. Bright red should also be avoided as this "bleeds" on camera, giving off a slight hazy glow. Also, avoid jewelry that dangles. It is not only visually distracting, but microphones will pick up on their movement.

VRI and Team Interpreting



Remote interpreting causes interpreter fatigue more rapidly than with traditional face-to-face interpreting. Video interpreters should employ self-care techniques to guard against overuse injuries and burnout. Fatigue factors affect the quality of the interpretation, requiring shorter lengths of time interpreting prior to alternating interpreters. If an interpreter is working alone, it may be necessary to arrange frequent rest breaks.

The RID Team Interpreting Standard Practice Paper cites rationale for team interpreting including factors such as length and/or complexity of the assignment, unique needs of the persons being served, and physical and emotional dynamics of the setting. At times, there is a need for the addition of a Deaf interpreter.

[from RID Standard Practice Paper on VRI]

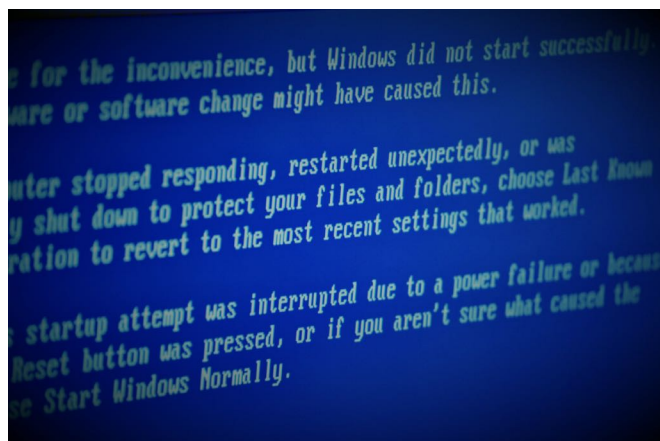
Tips to Consider...

If the meeting host allows you to join the virtual meeting early, pre-conferencing sessions with your interpreting team can still take place. Likewise, after the meeting has concluded, post-conferencing sessions can take place with your team after other participants have signed off. If you know the phone numbers of other team interpreters, pre, post, and in situ conferencing can be conducted through text messaging too.

Also, becoming familiar with various videoconferencing software features will allow the interpreting team to manage settings to capture the best views of the participants.



VRI and Communication Access Real-Time Translation (CART)



There is no reason to believe that the interactions between video remote interpreting (VRI) providers and remote CART providers are going to differ significantly from traditional usage, that is, there will be very little interaction.

VRI providers and remote CART providers will all depend on having the highest quality audio available to them, which means that communication protocols outlined elsewhere in this document need to be enforced strictly.

VRI providers will also need the highest possible quality video connections, which may not be as important to remote CART providers who usually only have an audio feed. This of course is at the discretion of the remote CART provider - if the remote CART provider would want to have a one-way video connection so that they can visually identify speakers, they should be able to join the meeting just like a VRI Provider can - as long as doing so does not impact usability for the other participants.

In real life, ASL interpreters often depend on CART providers for backup if they miss a word or phrase. As such, it would be helpful to share the text transcript URL of the CART output with the VRI providers as well. This should be the responsibility of the host, since they will have all the relevant information provided. The host is also responsible for providing preparatory information to all VRI providers and all remote CART providers.

For a VRI Provider who may be using an iPad pro for their main interface, they will need to sit sufficiently far from the screen so that participants can see all of their signing. This will make it almost impossible for any VRI provider with less than outstanding eyesight to read integrated captioning that may be provided in-app on the small screen. [continued on next page]

VRI and Communication Access Real-Time Translation (CART)

It is highly recommended that a VRI provider opens the CART URL on a second device for that reason, and to avoid obscuring other on-screen participants. VRI providers should become familiar with how to adjust the text transcript of the remote CART output, so they should be given the URL ahead of the meeting.

Remote CART providers often mute their microphones, so if they need to ask for clarification or indicate that there is a problem, they will often depend on a participant (who is usually the CART consumer) to voice their concerns. If the ASL interpreters could assume that responsibility, that would be much more natural, because putting the consumer in that position makes them the focal point of the communication rather than allowing them to remain a participant.

Remote CART provider switching, when necessary for long meetings with more than one remote CART provider, should be affected through the remote CART feed. One provider will write " SWITCHING PROVIDER " so the other provider knows to begin writing.



Resource List of Web and Video Conferencing Platforms (non-healthcare)



Disclaimer: Resources listed are not meant to be construed as endorsement of products. Contractors purchase and utilize software products at their own risk and assume all liability for its use.

Free (listed in no particular order)

- a. [Zoom Meeting](#)
- b. [Skype](#)
- c. [Free Conference](#)
- d. [Google Hangouts](#)
- e. [Cisco WebEx Meetings](#)

Paid (listed in no particular order)

- a. [GoToMeeting](#)
- b. [CyberLink U Meeting](#)
- c. [Zoom Meetings](#)
- d. [BlueJeans](#)
- e. [Lifesize](#)
- f. [Google Hangouts Meetings](#)

Resource List of HIPAA Compliant Web and Video Conferencing Platforms (healthcare)



Disclaimer: Resources listed are not meant to be construed as endorsement of products. Contractors purchase and utilize software products at their own risk and assume all liability for its use.

Interpreters need to make educated decisions that consider the protected health information (PHI) of consumers. This includes abiding by Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) regulations when it comes to any data, especially video. HIPAA regulations are designed to protect the privacy of patient information. There are guidelines for the transfer and storage of data on digital channels. The guidelines include details about the use of data, encryption, servers, authentication, and audit trails. This shared responsibility can be formalized through a business associate agreement (BAA). The agreement is a method of sharing the risk and is, essentially, a promise to be accountable should a HIPAA breach take place. [from jotform.com]

Zoom for Healthcare

<https://zoom.us/healthcare>

Cisco WebEx

<https://www.webex.com/webexremotehealth.html>

Doxy.me

<https://doxy.me/>

Thera-LINK

<https://www.thera-link.com/>

TheraNest

<https://theranest.com/>

VSee

<https://vsee.com/>

Simple Practice

<https://www.simplepractice.com/>

Resources for Small Business Relief- Federal



Federal Assistance through the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA)

Federal

The U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) is offering up to \$2 million in Economic Injury Disaster Loans for small businesses impacted by the coronavirus, in addition to a resource page detailing eligibility and how to apply.

For more information:

https://www.sba.gov/disaster-assistance/coronavirus-covid-19?fbclid=IwAR0rOzq1OQ_tJNrpeLwsIC1GxHYMxtPVYiMSUV--hOOetDmk8ZEdgsnHZz8

Resources for Small Business Relief- State

State

The Baker-Polito Administration has announced economic support for small businesses with a loan fund to provide financial relief to those that have been affected by COVID-19.

The Small Business Recovery Loan Fund will provide emergency capital up to \$75,000 to Massachusetts-based businesses impacted by COVID-19 with under 50 full- and part-time employees, including nonprofits. Loans are immediately available to eligible businesses with no payments due for the first 6 months. Massachusetts Growth Capital Corporation (MGCC) has capitalized the fund and will administer it.

How to Apply:

Please complete the application found on MGCC's website, [EmpoweringSmallBusiness.org](https://empowering-small-business.org). Completed applications can be sent via email to mgcc@massgcc.com with the subject line "2020 Small Business Recovery Loan Fund".

Loan Fund Details:

Who Qualifies:

Open to Massachusetts-based businesses impacted by COVID-19 with under 50 full- and part-time employees, including nonprofits (negative impact must be verifiable).

Terms and Conditions:

This fund is being offered with no payments due for the first 6 months, then 30-months of principal and interest payments and no prepayment penalties.

Businesses can apply for loans up to \$75,000.

For more information, go to:

<https://www.mass.gov/info-details/covid-19-guidance-and-directives#businesses-&-employment->

Resources for Small Business Relief-Unemployment



Currently self-employed individuals and 1099 contract employees are not eligible for unemployment benefits. If the President of the United States makes a disaster unemployment declaration for Massachusetts or nationwide, the self-employed and 1099 contractors would become eligible for unemployment assistance. This is already coded into the DUA system and would be available immediately upon declaration and press release announcement.

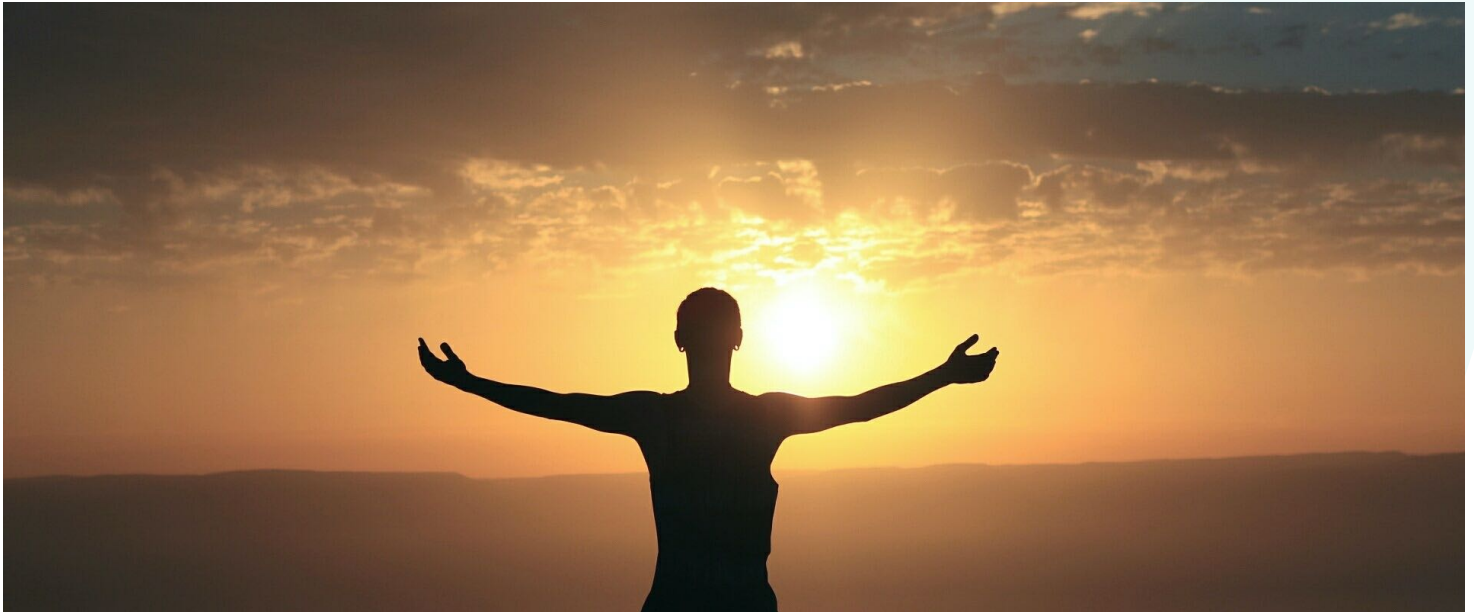
The Massachusetts Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development (EOLWD) and the Department of Unemployment Assistance (DUA), in coordination with the U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL), are taking a series of actions to assist workers and employers.

To assist individuals who cannot work due to the impact of COVID-19, the Baker-Polito administration has filed emergency legislation and emergency regulations that allow people impacted by COVID-19 to collect unemployment if their workplace is shut down.

For more information about unemployment benefits:

<https://www.mass.gov/resource/information-on-unemployment-and-coronavirus-covid-19>

Resources for Self-Care During COVID-19



Managing stress and anxiety during times of emergency are necessary for self-care.

The CDC has resources for Manage Anxiety & Stress, including information about reducing stress in yourself and others. The Disaster Distress Helpline, **1-800-985-5990**, is a 24/7, 365-day-a-year, national hotline dedicated to providing immediate crisis counseling for people who are experiencing emotional distress related to any natural or human-caused disaster, including disease outbreaks like COVID-19. This toll-free, multilingual, and confidential crisis support service is available to all residents in the United States and its territories.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/managing-stress-anxiety>.

American Psychological Association (APA)

<https://www.apa.org/practice/programs/dmhi/research-information/pandemics>

University of Massachusetts (UMASS)

<https://www.childtrends.org/publications/resources-for-supporting-childrens-emotional-well-being-during-the-covid-19-pandemic>

State Crisis Intervention Hotline (DMH and MassHealth)

The state's toll-free Crisis Intervention Line (**877-382-1609**) is staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week. DMH has published resources to support individuals in coping with COVID-19:

<https://www.mass.gov/info-details/maintaining-emotional-health-well-being-during-the-covid-19-outbreak>.

Vital Safety Information for Interpreters



If you test positive for the coronavirus (COVID-19), please inform the MCDHH referral staff so that they may follow-up with requestors with whom you have worked during the two weeks prior to your test confirmation.

Contact Information for Assistance

MCDHH Interpreter Referral Department

Please contact:

Scott LeSaffre, Lead Referral Specialist

(508) 616-2281 (voice)

(857) 488-5473 (cell)

scott.lesaffre@mass.gov (email)

Product Technical Assistance

Please contact your computer hardware and software providers. For all other technical concerns not related to product assistance, please contact:

Jonathan O'Dell

(617) 740-1670 (voice)

(617) 849-9021 (VP)

(857) 488-5467 (cell)

jonathan.odell@mass.gov (email)

COVID-19 Safety Issues or Concerns

Please contact the Massachusetts Department of Public Health or 211.

<https://www.mass.gov/orgs/departments-of-public-health>