

Missouri Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing and Missouri Sheriffs' Association Signed Memorandum of Understanding to Serve Deaf and Hard of Hearing Missourians

The Missouri Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (MCDHH) has signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the Missouri Sheriffs' Association (MSA) Thursday, July 17, in order to facilitate a cooperative relationship between sheriffs and the Deaf and Hard of Hearing communities in Missouri.

MCDHH Executive Director Opeoluwa Sotonwa and MSA Executive Director Mick Covington signed the MOU which expresses a commitment to develop mutually beneficial programs, projects, activities, and funding proposals.

One key part of the partnership will be providing training for law enforcement officers on appropriate communication tools for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Missourians. These tools include visor communication cards provided by MCDHH to facilitate conversation using common images and symbols in place of speech.

MCDHH will provide training in other areas as well. Understanding the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community, awareness of the statutorily mandated rights of individuals with hearing loss, and emergency planning will help prepare officers. They will also be introduced to the benefits and limitations of using different modes of communication, the risks of using friends and family as interpreters, and the importance of interpreter confidentiality.

MSA's Crime Victims Unit already exists to provide resources and advocacy for victims of crimes. Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals are one group that is a focus of this unit. It is important to MSA that individuals are treated kindly and with respect from the first encounter with law enforcement and through every state of the criminal justice process.

Training and community workshops explaining the goals and methods of each community will be used to build stronger relationships between law enforcement and people with hearing loss and encourage healthy conversation between the groups.

"Deaf and Hard of Hearing people in Missouri have for a long time experienced communication barriers with law enforcement agencies," said Sotonwa. "I'm delighted that this new mutual collaboration between MCDHH and MSA will help remove that barrier."

One common reason for miscommunication is the Deaf or Hard of Hearing individual being unable to hear commands or requests from the officer and not complying as a result. Training through the MSA will equip sheriffs with methods of preventing these miscommunications, ranging from simply tapping the person on the shoulder, to using body language, to pointing to the written words on a citation.

About MCDHH:

MCDHH works with individuals, service providers, businesses, organizations, and state agencies to improve the lives and opportunities of all Missourians with hearing loss. It functions as an agency of the state to advocate for public policies, regulations, and programs to improve the quality and coordination of existing services for individuals with hearing loss, and to promote

new services whenever necessary. More information about MCDHH and the services it offers are available at <http://mcdhh.mo.gov>.

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