



THE STATE  
of ALASKA  
GOVERNOR MIKE DUNLEAVY

## Department of Health

SENIOR AND DISABILITY SERVICES  
Governor's Council on Disabilities  
and Special Education

550 W 7<sup>th</sup> Ave. Suite 1220  
Anchorage, Alaska 99501  
Main: 907.269.8990  
Toll Free: 1.888.269.8990  
Fax: 907.269.8995

May 2, 2024

The Honorable Senator Gary Stevens and  
The Honorable Representative Cathy Tilton  
Alaska State Legislature

Re: AKLeg.gov ADA Accessibility

Dear Senate President Stevens and House Speaker Tilton,

The Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education (the Council) fills a variety of federal and state roles, including serving as the State Council on Developmental Disabilities (SCDD) under the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act, the Interagency Coordinating Council for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities (ICC) and the Special Education Advisory Panel (SEAP) under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the governing board of the Special Education Services Agency (SESA), and is an advisory board for the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority (the Trust). As the state DD Council, ICC, and SEAP, the Council works with Senior and Disabilities Services and the Department of Education and Early Development to ensure people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) and their families receive the services and supports that they need, as well as participate in the planning and design of those services.

While tracking and advocating for HB 111 – Education for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children – the Council was again reminded of the accessibility limitations of the akleg.gov website. The live stream option on akleg.gov does not have a closed caption option available for those who are deaf or hard of hearing who need to be able to read the words to follow the proceedings. This first came to our attention in 2021 and we have contacted the Legislature's main office each year requesting this be addressed so the Deaf community can have equal access to their government as their hearing peers. Those requests seem to have not been heard.

Title 2 of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires state and local government to give people with disabilities equal opportunity to benefit from all programs, services, and activities and states those governments must communicate with people with disabilities as effectively as they communicate with others. This includes being able to participate in and follow Legislative hearings on the Alaska Legislature's website, akleg.gov. By not having a closed caption option available our state government is not communicating with its deaf and hard of hearing constituents as effectively as it is with its hearing constituents.

The Council has been successful in requesting American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters be available for hearings in the House and Senate where invited or public testimony will be taken regarding HB 111 and SB 143 to ensure the Deaf community could participate fully.

Understanding the limitations of akleg.gov and its lack of closed captioning we made the same request for a hearing on HB 111 where testimony was not on the agenda. This request was not granted, or more accurately, it was ignored. We received no response to this request and while watching the hearing on akleg.gov there was no ASL interpreter visible on the live stream. This made that hearing inaccessible to the demographic most affected by the bill being heard – the Deaf community. Afterwards we talked with someone from the Legislative Affairs Agency (LAA), who acts as the Legislature’s in house ADA coordinator, and was told that the request for access to that particular hearing was not passed onto them by the sponsoring legislators office. In the future we will make sure our request for access includes this person. It should be noted that while there is an accessibility link on the website, it is difficult to find. Placing the link in a more conspicuous location on the LAA website could help individuals to identify more easily who to contact for ADA access issues.

We understand having an ASL interpreter for every legislative hearing is not a viable solution for several reasons; however, making the live feed of all hearings on akleg.gov accessible to the Deaf and hard of hearing community through a closed captioning option should be considered a reasonable accommodation. By not having this option available the Legislature is in violation of Title 2 of the ADA.

Please feel free to reach out to the Council if you have questions or need further information. The Council stands ready to partner with the Legislature and work toward an equitable solution that makes our state government accessible to all Alaskans, not just those who can hear.

Sincerely,



---

Jena Crafton, Chair



---

Patrick Reinhart, Executive Director

cc. Jessica Geary, Executive Director, Legislative Affairs Agency  
Heidi Hedberg, Commissioner, Department of Health  
Jordan Shilling, Director of Boards and Commissions, Office of the Governor  
David Newman, State ADA Coordinator, Department of Administration  
GCDSE Members