



April 15, 2020

Governor Ron DeSantis
Governor's Office
400 S. Monroe St.
Tallahassee, FL 32399

Dear Governor DeSantis:

Disability Rights Florida is the federally designated legal protection and advocacy agency for people with disabilities in the state of Florida. Our mandate is to ensure people with disabilities understand and exercise their rights under the law, ensuring their full and equal participation in society. Disability Rights Florida is authorized to pursue appropriate remedies and approaches to ensure the protection of, and advocacy for, the rights of individuals with disabilities.

We have recently notified your office by phone and email on several occasions expressing our concern regarding the lack of compliance under Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act ("ADA") at your press and news conferences on the Coronavirus. Section 12132 of the ADA specifies, no qualified individual with a disability shall, by reason of such disability, be excluded from participation in or be denied the benefits of services, programs, or activities of a public entity, or be subjected to discrimination by any such entity. There are approximately 800,000 individuals in Florida who are deaf or hard of hearing. Effective communication is required to afford individuals with disabilities access, the same access as non-disabled individuals, to vital information provided by government entities. We are extremely concerned as several of your news and press conferences were held without a sign language interpreter present, denying a large population of individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing without up to date, important and potentially lifesaving information. The information you are providing on Coronavirus is crucial to the health and welfare of Floridians.

The first news conference on the Coronavirus was on March 2, 2020, in Tampa without a qualified sign language interpreter. To date we've observed a minimum of 11 conferences without a qualified sign language interpreter. We have reached out to your office by phone and several emails dated 3/6/20, 3/10/20, 3/19/20, 3/27/20, and 4/6/20. We want to take this opportunity to provide information and advocacy on behalf of Floridians who are deaf or hard of hearing. We have expressed our gravest concern regarding your office's lack of consistency in providing the required accommodations to

ensure equal access to effective communication on Coronavirus updates, which places this vulnerable population of Florida residents at risk.

These are no doubt challenging times and while some considerations might be easily overlooked, there is no doubt the Coronavirus brings with it significant added concerns for people with disabilities. As such, we must respectfully request that your office comply by providing effective communication for a vulnerable population of individuals who rely on sign language to receive the extremely important life affecting information you provide. Floridians are relying on you during this time of crisis and we want to ensure all Floridians receive equal access to your news and press conferences.

We thank you in advance for your attention to this matter and look forward to your efforts to ensure all Floridians receive effective communication regarding the ongoing pandemic.

Best Regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ann Siegel". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Ann" written in a large, looped style and the last name "Siegel" written in a more standard cursive script.

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