

# International Week of Deaf People Observed Sept. 20-26

## KCDHH Encourages Inclusion during COVID-19 and Other Emergencies

**FRANKFORT, Ky. (Sept. 14, 2021)** – Living with hearing loss comes with challenges, but the [Kentucky Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing](#) (KCDHH) is encouraging Kentuckians to learn about the advocacy, support, therapies and technology that are available, especially during the pandemic. During [International Week of Deaf](#) People Sept. 20-26, KCDHH is highlighting ongoing efforts for social inclusion, communication during a crisis and awareness of organizations that support people who are deaf and hard of hearing.

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, KCDHH Executive Director Virginia Moore, a licensed American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter, and two of her staff interpreters have delivered Gov. Andy Beshear’s updates on the pandemic using ASL to individuals who depend on sign language. Moore said this was the beginning of providing a sense of inclusiveness to this population.

“COVID-19 has brought a new awareness about the importance of including everyone when we are conveying information, especially during an emergency,” said Gov. Beshear. “Having Virginia Moore and KCDHH to help our citizens who depend on sign language for information has really opened everyone’s eyes to the importance of inclusion in state government and other organizations. I hope it also has made people with hearing loss aware of the many services of KCDHH.”

“This is the first time Kentucky’s gubernatorial office has welcomed someone to sign alongside them in public appearances,” said Moore. “There’s a community out there that not only needs this information but deserves it.”

Even before the pandemic, KCDHH staff met with several counties to encourage public captioning on televisions and is currently promoting Text-to-911 also known as [Smart911](#), a text message service to reach 911 emergency call takers from a mobile phone or device.

“In an emergency, hearing loss becomes truly disabling,” said Moore. “Now, with captioning and Text-to-911 there are alternative resources for receiving emergency notification and information that may be needed.”

With the Governor advising face masks to be worn in public, KCDHH also provided ClearMasks for those interacting with deaf and hard of hearing individuals.

“If you could imagine, most deaf and hard of hearing individuals depend on lip reading and facial expressions to help with communication,” said Moore. “Cloth masks add yet another communication barrier with this population, however, clear masks can help to alleviate some of that since they allow deaf and hard of hearing individuals to see the whole face.”

Hearing loss is one of the most common conditions affecting older adults and may be hard to detect because it usually happens over time. Approximately one in three adults between the ages of 65 and 74 has hearing loss, according to the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders.

In addition, hearing loss and tinnitus are the top two service-connected disabilities among U.S. veterans, according to the Hearing Health Foundation. And one in five teens also experience some degree of permanent hearing loss due to listening to music through earbuds at unsafe volumes.

“People can experience hearing loss at any age for a variety of reasons,” said Moore. “Hearing loss can be sudden or gradual and can be caused by noise, disease, accident, genetics or aging. Many citizens are not aware of the multitude of state and national resources that are available to them through the Kentucky Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. KCDHH has a resource library that can be accessed in person or through the mail.”

Books and videos on topics ranging from coping with a hearing loss to assistive devices, legal rights and parenting a child with a hearing loss are available through the library. KCDHH also distributes, at no cost, specialized telephone equipment to any Kentucky resident who has a hearing loss or speech impairment that affects his ability to effectively communicate using a regular telephone. The agency also provides communication visor cards and fact sheets targeting hearing loss and prevention.

There are over 48 million Americans who have significant hearing loss, according to the 2011 National Health Interview Survey. By 2030, the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders estimates that number to be 90 million. Nearly 16% or nearly 700,000 Kentuckians report some type of hearing loss, according to 2010 American Community Survey, U.S. Census.

International Deaf Awareness Week, now known as International Week of the Deaf People (IWDP), is observed by the World Federation of the Deaf and focuses on increasing awareness of deaf issues, people and culture.

To learn about KCDHH and the resources available to those suffering from hearing loss, visit [www.kcdhh.ky.gov](http://www.kcdhh.ky.gov) or follow us on [Facebook](#).