



State of Connecticut  
**Department of Aging and Disability Services**

**BEST PRACTICES FOR VIRTUAL COMMUNICATIONS WITH PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES**

As the state begins its phased-in approach of opening business and community sites during the COVID 19 pandemic, state agencies are also resuming some in person operations, but a significant amount of state business remains virtual.

The following best practices may be helpful to ensure effective communications with Connecticut residents with disabilities.

**Virtual Board Meetings (if not a Board meeting, the same basic practices apply, without the portion on voting):**

- The Chair:
  - Will ensure the interpreter remains pinned for best viewing;
  - Will open with a brief summary/introductions;
  - Will guide the discussion and moderate turn taking and questions;
  - Will bring up agenda items, and will call on people to answer;
  - Will pause between different agenda items to allow for comments and questions;
  - For voting, will ask who is in favor, against, and abstaining; and,
  - Will share notes or outline of agenda with interpreters and members prior to the meeting.
- Members
  - Will introduce themselves at the beginning of the meeting;
  - Keep their device muted unless they are speaking;
  - If using the videoconferencing platform, will raise their hand to speak, and will wait to be recognized by the Chair before proceeding;
  - Will identify themselves before they start speaking to *ensure that everyone knows who they are*; and,
  - If asking a question of another member, say the person's name so it is clear who it is directed at.



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**Using Relay Services with people who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing**

Anyone who wishes to use Relay Connecticut should simply dial the toll-free number (800-842-9488), or 711, to connect with a relay operator. The relay operator will dial the requested number and “relay” the conversation between the two callers. You may also receive a call from someone using a Relay Operator. If you do, please remember:

- Relay Operators are *not* part of the conversation, so be sure to speak to the person that you called, or that called you;
- In order to keep the conversation moving with less confusion, say “go ahead” when you are done speaking. When you hear “go ahead” from the Relay operator, that means it is your turn to speak again.
- Federal law requires that all relay calls are kept confidential. No records are kept.

**Accessible Documents**

Whether for meetings or working virtually with people with disabilities, it is important to ensure any documents being shared are accessible. Most Microsoft products, such as Word and PowerPoint, have accessibility checkers built-in.

Accessible documents and web pages allow individuals who use a screen reader to maneuver through documents, utilize document properties for contact information and document styles to jump from one part of a document to another, to hear descriptions from picture and image tags to help understand the images on the pages, and to have equal access to information that most of us take for granted. They also ensure people with low vision, or different types of color-blindness can navigate a document by using high contrast colors, clear typefaces, built in navigations, such as titles, bullets, numbered lists and more.

For more information on creating accessible documents, visit the [accessibility page](#) on the Aging and Disability Services website.

**Telehealth during COVID-19**

[The National Association of the Deaf](#) has put forth guidelines for deaf and hard of hearing people and healthcare providers to use during the COVID-19 pandemic. The guidelines can be found at <https://www.nad.org/2020/04/17/telehealth-during-coronavirus/>.

*General guidance includes:*

The patient must instruct the healthcare professional about what the appropriate reasonable accommodation(s) are for the telehealth appointment: qualified interpreting services, captioning services, or both. There are four possibilities for a patient-directed accommodation:



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- Remote interpreting services on the same screen or platform allows for the direct participation of qualified interpreters and transliterators.<sup>[1]</sup>
- Communication access real-time translation (CART) on the same screen or platform allows a qualified captioner to caption the call on the screen. This can be provided by itself or along with remote interpreting services.
- Use of accessibility services, such as remote interpreting and captioning, on a separate screen or device.
- Use of other accessibility services on a separate screen or platform, such as relay services. Please review the appendix for limitations with this approach.

### **ADA Compliance**

State agencies should accommodate the needs of persons with disabilities consistent with the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Most information on public accommodation can be found in Title III of the ADA at <https://www.ada.gov/>.

There are many general resources for people with disabilities available on the COVID-19 website at <https://portal.ct.gov/Coronavirus/Information-For/Individuals-with-Disabilities>