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Collaboration with Kansas Bar Association Focuses on Closing Communication Access Gaps for Kansans who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing

Topeka, Kan. — The Kansas Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing and the Kansas Bar Association are collaborating to ensure Kansans who are deaf and hard of hearing have access to interpreting services or other communication access needed when consulting legal counsel. The partnership is the first of three components related to the Communication Access Fund launched this fall.

“The partnership with the Kansas Bar Association will provide an avenue for attorneys who are hearing and clients who are deaf and hard of hearing to communicate with one another in a manner that allows both parties to have equal access,” said Robert Cooper, KCDHH executive director. “We believe this is extremely important and will allow KCDHH the ability to educate attorneys about their ADA responsibilities and best practices in working with clients who are deaf and hard of hearing.”

“The KBA is pleased to collaborate with the Kansas Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. Not only does this provide access to legal services for clients, but it also provides a service that our deaf and hard of hearing attorneys can use. Increasing access to justice through services and technology will also increase our reach to deaf and hard of hearing individuals and attorneys in our rural communities,” said Martha Coffman, KBA Access to Justice Committee chair.

“The Kansas Bar Association fully supports programs that secure and provide equal participation by persons with all communication methods. This pilot program is one that we are happy to help promote,” said Laura Ice, KBA President.

The KCDHH Communication Access Fund is a pilot project focusing on three specific areas during fiscal year 2024 (July 2023 through June 2024): Component Supporting Attorneys, Special Healthcare Access, and Access Conversion.

“The objective of the Communication Access Fund is to address the most common communication access gaps in Kansas,” Robert said.

The area of Component Supporting Attorneys is not limited to client/counsel meetings. The goal is to ensure effective communication between private attorneys and all people who are deaf and hard of hearing, including prospective clients, clients, witnesses and others with whom the attorney will communicate.

The Communication Access Fund for Component Supporting Attorneys will provide:

- Full coverage of interpreter costs for an initial client and counsel meeting, up to two hours.
- Recommended lifetime cap of \$500 per client to be utilized for client and counsel meetings. Billable hours for email or telephone communication are not eligible.
- Additional funding may be requested and provided based on available funds and will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.
- Attorneys working through Kansas State Board of Indigents' Defense Services should consult internally about funding.
- Consult the [policy description](#) to learn additional details about the program utilization.

The KCDHH will coordinate interpreting services on behalf of the program to eliminate the need for attorneys to submit billing and invoices and ensure that the services provided are appropriate to meet the communication needs of the individual who is deaf or hard of hearing.

Learn more about the Communication Access Fund: <https://kcdhh.ks.gov/communication-services/communication-access-fund>.

For consideration of assistance through pilot Communication Access Fund program, please email Robert.Cooper@ks.gov, KCDHH executive director.

To request for an interpreter or other communication access services, please email DCF.KCDHHrequests@ks.gov.

For additional information and/or to request for appropriate forms or documents, please contact the KCDHH at 785-368-8034 or 785-246-5077.

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