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DFEH Settles Disability Discrimination Case Against Riverside County Sheriff's Department

County Will Revamp Its Deaf and Hard of Hearing Accommodations and Pay \$50,000 to Settle Claims that It Denied Deaf Man Sign Language Interpretation During Two Interrogations in Jail

Sacramento – The California Department of Fair Employment and Housing (DFEH) has reached a \$50,000 settlement with the Riverside County Sheriff's Department in a disability discrimination case filed on behalf of a deaf man whose requests for sign language interpretation were allegedly denied during two criminal interrogations in a Riverside County jail.

In a complaint filed with DFEH in November 2016 the man alleged Riverside County sheriff's deputies twice denied him the assistance of an American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter, which he needs to communicate effectively with law enforcement officers. In June 2015, deputies instead used handwritten notes to question the complainant about an alleged criminal incident. In May 2016, when the complainant declined to participate in a second criminal interrogation until an ASL interpreter was provided, deputies proceeded to charge him with an offense without providing an interpreter or completing an interrogation. The man was incarcerated in a county detention center during both interactions.

DFEH found cause to believe a violation of the Fair Employment and Housing Act had occurred and filed a civil complaint in Riverside County Superior Court.

"California's civil rights laws require public entities to take appropriate steps to ensure that communications with individuals with disabilities are equally effective as communications with others," said DFEH Director Kevin Kish. "A public entity cannot assume a particular communication method is effective or sufficient simply because an individual communicates basic information using that method."

In addition to paying \$50,000 to settle DFEH's civil suit and a related federal suit filed by the complainant, the Riverside County Sheriff's Department has agreed to contract with sufficient interpreter services to accommodate the needs of deaf or hard of hearing individuals both in custody and in the field, and to defer non-emergency communications with individuals who have requested sign language interpretation until interpretation is provided. In addition, the sheriff's department agreed to maintain sufficient telecommunications devices to accommodate the needs of deaf or hard of hearing individuals, and to advise inmates of the availability of interpreters and other disability accommodations through posted signs and an internal broadcast system. The department will also implement policy revisions intended to improve the collection and circulation of information on individuals' communication needs.

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The DFEH is the state agency charged with enforcing California's civil rights laws. The mission of the DFEH is to protect the people of California from unlawful discrimination in employment, housing and public accommodations and from hate violence and human trafficking. For more information, visit the DFEH's web site at www.dfeh.ca.gov.

