



**Emma Davidson MLA**

Minister for Disability

Minister for Justice Health

Minister for Mental Health

Assistant Minister for Seniors, Veterans, Families and Community Services

Member for Murrumbidgee

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Mr Tom Duncan  
Clerk  
ACT Legislative Assembly  
London Circuit  
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Our ref: 22/144/CAB

Dear Mr Duncan

Thank you for your letter of 8 February 2022, regarding petition 33-21 – Auslan Rights, lodged by Ms Nicole Lawder MLA, on Tuesday 8 February 2022.

The petition raises the concern Deaf Canberrans are being disadvantaged because the availability of services and information in Auslan is inadequate in the ACT.

DeafACT estimate there are currently 300 Deaf or Hard of Hearing people who communicate using Auslan in the ACT and surrounding region, which includes Queanbeyan, Goulburn, Yass and Cooma.

Ensuring government information and services are accessible and available in a variety of formats, including through the use of Auslan interpreting services, requires a whole of government approach. I observe the close working relationship developed by our Chief Minister and public officials through the course of the COVID pandemic with our local Auslan interpreters and understand there is recognition of the importance of their work across government. Progression of this work will need to be at a whole of government level and I understand the Community Services Directorate (CSD) are keen to support leadership by the CMTEDD Government Communications Unit in this work.

There is an identified shortage of certified interpreter level 3 Auslan Interpreters within the ACT. This shortage affects those who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing from accessing services and supports on an equal basis as other members of the community. An appropriate mechanism to address the barriers to people becoming certified Auslan Interpreters may be through a future ACT Budget process.

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With video remote interpreting (VRI) now becoming more accessible, the Canberra Deaf Community advise they do have better access to interpreters from all around Australia using computer conferencing technology and smartphone technology platforms. However, VRI is not always the appropriate method of access and interpreting face to face is often preferred and more appropriate. VRI can also be restricted by network quality and the costs associated with high data streaming. DeafACT advise the Canberra Deaf community need shop fronts and Health facilities with the necessary technology so that Deaf people can access VRI.

The ACT Government has commenced extensive consultations to inform the development of a ten-year Disability Strategy for the ACT. This work presents the opportunity to seek ideas and solutions from community on the ways that Auslan supports can be provided.

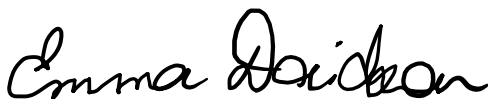
The new Disability Strategy will be co-designed by people with disability, government and the disability sector, with all consultations and forums led by people with disability. The ACT Government will hear from people with disability, families, carers, supporters and interested community members on how to create a more inclusive future for all Canberrans.

Consultations for the ACT Disability Strategy will provide an opportunity for people with disability, including the Deaf Community, to have a say on their priorities for the ACT Disability Strategy over the next 10 years.

ACT Government will build on the commitment under the ACT Disability Justice Strategy 2019-29 First Action Plan, for government agencies to develop Disability Action and Inclusion Plans (DAIPs). DAIPs outline an agency's commitment to take action to improve inclusion in their facilities and services, including the provision of Auslan interpreting where it is necessary and appropriate.

The Government welcomes the referral of this petition to the Standing Committee on Education and Community Inclusion, and the potential consideration by the Committee of the issues raised by the Canberra Deaf community.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Emma Davidson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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