

Boris Johnson MP
Prime Minister
By email
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<https://email.number10.gov.uk/>

Thursday 30 April 2020

Dear Prime Minister,

Lack of British Sign Language (BSL) interpretation at UK Government daily Coronavirus briefings

As you are aware, the Equality and Human Rights Commission is Great Britain's national equality body and human rights institution. We entirely recognise and endorse the primary role of government in the current context: to keep people safe and protect the future of our nation. We are contributing our expertise on the equality and human rights implications of the pandemic, and of the Government's response, on an ongoing basis.

To that end, I am writing to raise our concerns about the lack of provision of live

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British Sign Language (BSL) interpretation at your daily Government Coronavirus briefings. We note your commitment on 16th March 2020, in response to a written Parliamentary Question, to provide a sign language service during official statements for the foreseeable future in line with the approaches of the Scottish and Welsh Governments at their daily briefings. However, the provision that has been made by your Government is only for an on screen interpreter on the separate BBC News Channel.

You will know that there are more than 80,000 Deaf people living in the United Kingdom whose first language is BSL. The provision of an interpreter is essential for them to understand the information being provided, and the delays with onscreen interpretation make this more difficult. This is a particular concern given the importance of these briefings, and the potentially significant health or even criminal implications if the information is unclear or misunderstood.

Including a BSL interpreter live at your daily briefings would allow you to demonstrate your commitment to equality for all, meeting your obligations to make reasonable adjustments under the Equality Act 2010.

I am therefore writing to ask that you immediately reconsider your position and provide live BSL interpretation at your daily Government Coronavirus briefings.

I look forward to hearing from you.

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Yours sincerely,



Rebecca Hilsenrath

Chief Executive

Cc Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work

| cc Minister for Women and Equalities

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