

U.S. Attorney's Office Reaches Agreement with William Beaumont Hospital to Resolve ADA Investigation Regarding Effective Communication

DETROIT – The U.S. Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of Michigan has reached an agreement with William Beaumont Hospital, a component of Beaumont Health -- the largest health care system in Michigan, to resolve allegations that it violated the Americans with Disabilities Act when it failed to provide effective communication for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing, U.S. Attorney Matthew Schneider announced today.

The agreement resolves complaints filed with the U.S. Attorney's Office that alleged that William Beaumont Hospital failed to provide sign language interpreters to deaf patients despite their repeated requests to obtain an interpreter for complex medical appointments and procedures. Because of the hospital's failure to provide sign language interpreter services, deaf individuals were denied the benefit of effective communication with hospital staff, the opportunity to effectively participate in medical treatment decisions, and the full benefit of health care services provided by the hospital.

The investigation, which was conducted by the U.S. Attorney's Office Civil Rights Unit, revealed that Beaumont's systems were not adequate to ensure that deaf and hard of hearing patients are provided with auxiliary aids and services to guarantee effective communication throughout their medical treatment. Beaumont worked cooperatively with the U.S. Attorney's Office throughout the investigation.

"The ADA protects the right of individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing to be able to access medical services, and this agreement is the latest example of our office's unwavering commitment to enforcing the ADA," said Matthew Schneider, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Michigan. "This settlement enables Beaumont and the federal government to achieve their common goal to ensure that deaf and hard of hearing patients can communicate with their doctors and obtain equal access to medical treatment, especially at critical moments in their care."

The settlement agreement requires Beaumont, for each of its three hospitals and 31 affiliated health care facilities, to provide training to hospital staff on the requirements of the ADA; to adopt specific policies and procedures to ensure that auxiliary aids and services, including sign language interpreters, are promptly provided to patients or companions who are deaf or hard of hearing; and to designate specific Beaumont ADA personnel to ensure access to appropriate auxiliary aids and services.

The ADA prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities by hospitals. Among other things, the ADA requires doctors, hospitals and other health care providers to provide equal access to patients and companions who are deaf or hard of hearing. When medical services involve important, lengthy or complex oral communications with patients or companions, hospitals are generally required to provide qualified sign language interpreters and other auxiliary aids, free of charge, to individuals who are deaf, are hard of hearing or have speech disabilities. The appropriate auxiliary aid to be provided depends on a variety of factors,

including the nature, length and importance of the communication; the context of the communication; the communication skills and knowledge of the individual who is deaf or hard of hearing; and the individual's stated need for a particular type of auxiliary aid.

Enforcing the ADA is a top priority of the Civil Rights Unit of the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of Michigan. Those interested in finding out more about this settlement or the obligations of hospitals and other health providers under the ADA may call the Department of Justice's toll-free ADA information line at [800-514-0301](tel:800-514-0301) or [800-514-0383](tel:800-514-0383)(TDD), or access the [ADA website](http://www.ada.gov) at www.ada.gov. ADA complaints within the Eastern District of Michigan can be made to the U.S. Attorney's Office Civil Rights Hotline at [\(313\) 226-9151](tel:313-226-9151) or usamie.civilrights@usdoj.gov.