

## Social Security

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### **Program Operations Manual System (POMS)**

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**TN 36 (10-12)**

## **GN 00203.012 Special Interviewing Situations (Deaf or Hard-of-Hearing Individual)**

### **A. Policy for interviewing Deaf or Hard-of-Hearing (DHOH) individuals**

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (P.L. 93-112) mandates Social Security Administration (SSA) ensure that an individual who is DHOH has meaningful access to our programs, activities, and facilities. This policy requires us to provide sign language interpreter services if an individual who is DHOH indicates he or she needs an interpreter to communicate effectively with the agency.

An individual who is DHOH is not required to use a sign language interpreter with whom he or she cannot effectively communicate. If the DHOH individual or SSA interviewer determines that effective communication is not occurring, we do not require the individual to continue using that sign language interpreter. The SSA interviewer will protect the filing date, if applicable, and terminate the interview until we locate an appropriate interpreter. For a description of appropriate interpreters, see GN 00203.012B in this section.

The individual who is DHOH has the option of providing his or her own sign language interpreter at no cost to SSA. When the agency provides interpreter services, the interpreter must be a qualified sign language interpreter, as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Managers and Administrative Law Judges (ALJ) are the approving officials who may authorize payment for sign language interpreter services and related expenses arranged by SSA. Such payments are subject to prior approval by the approving official. This authorization is within the local purchase authority.

### **B. Definitions of sign language interpreters**

## **1. Sign language interpreter**

A sign language interpreter is a person trained to translate between a spoken and a signed language. The sign language interpreter listens to speech and repeats it back to the DHOH individual using sign language interpretation, lip reading, cued speech transliteration, or hand gestures. While American Sign Language (ASL) is the most common form of sign language for DHOH individuals, there also are other types of sign language.

## **2. Certified sign language interpreter**

A certified sign language interpreter is any person certified by the National Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID), certified by the National Association of the Deaf (NAD), or holding a Level III state screening credential from any state Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf.

## **3. Qualified sign language interpreter**

A qualified sign language interpreter is any person who is able to interpret effectively, accurately, and impartially, both receptively and expressively, using any specialized terminology necessary for effective communication with SSA.

# **C. Procedure for interviewing a DHOH individual**

When initiating communication with an individual who is DHOH, an SSA employee should:

1. Provide a qualified and certified sign language interpreter for the interview if the individual schedules an appointment and requests an interpreter in advance.
2. Notify management if the SSA-arranged interpreter fails to attend the scheduled interview. Then, contact the SSA-arranged interpreter to inquire about his or her availability to attend the interview. Promptly offer to reschedule the appointment, secure another qualified and certified interpreter, or provide an SSA employee who is a qualified interpreter, if available.
3. Inform an individual seeking SSA services who does not have a scheduled appointment that there may be a wait while we serve customers with appointments at their scheduled time. Advise the individual we can schedule an appointment in the near future and provide an interpreter for the appointment.  
For scheduling future appointments, see TC 10010.020.

4. Allow the individual to select his or her preferred method of communication using the 11 x 17 inch options card when:
  - a. The individual does not request an interpreter in advance of the scheduled interview,
  - b. The scheduled interpreter fails to attend the interview, or
  - c. It is a walk-in interview.

For more information on the available options on the options card, see GN 00203.012F in this section.

5. Make sure the individual understands what is taking place during an interview. Pay special attention to, and consider how well the individual can communicate.
6. Conduct and complete the interview using the communication method preferred by the individual. However, if the individual is unable to communicate effectively using his or her selected method of communication, he or she may select a different method of communication.
7. Use the services of the interpreter accompanying the individual unless communication is ineffective or becomes difficult during the interview. In this event, the interviewer will offer to provide another interpreter, or suggest that the individual select another method of communication.
8. When using the services of a non SSA-arranged interpreter, follow the instructions in GN 00203.011H.
9. If the individual provides his or her own interpreter, and the SSA interviewer believes that the interpreter is not acting in the individual's best interest or is not providing accurate information to SSA, follow the instructions in GN 00203.011I.

## **D. Procedure for purchasing sign language interpreter services and related expenses**

### **1. Who authorizes the cost of interpreter services and related expenses**

Managers and ALJs are responsible for identifying and retaining the services of a qualified and certified sign language interpreter as defined in GN 00203.012B in this section. The manager or ALJ is the approving official and authorizes the cost of interpreter services and applicable related expenses prior to the interview with a DHOH individual. For more information on authorization of paid interpreters, see GN 00203.011E.

**NOTE:** If an individual who is DHOH makes his or her own private arrangements for an interpreter (e.g. bringing a friend, relative, or volunteer to the interview to serve as an interpreter), we do not pay for the interpreter's services.

## **2. Procedure for paying for interpreter services**

The approving official should:

- a. Contact agencies or organizations for the deaf to determine a reasonable hourly rate for local sign language interpreters;
- b. Pay travel expenses according to Federal Travel Regulations in the Administrative Instructions Manual System (AIMS) Guide; and
- c. Pay an approved reasonable compensation fee for the interpreter's services. In addition, we will compensate the interpreter if we arrange his or her services prior to the interview and the individual who is DHOH fails to attend the interview.

## **E. Procedure for using the DHOH options card**

The 11x17 inch laminated options card illustrates and explains the communication options available to an individual who is DHOH. The card provides options in both English and Spanish. The card has a laminate finish to provide an easy to erase surface to mark options that are available or unavailable on a daily basis.

Field offices (FO) and card centers must always place the options cards near the reception windows for providing easy access to the public. **DO NOT** hang the options card outside the reception window or hang in the reception area.

If an individual who is DHOH approaches a reception window without an interpreter, FOs and card centers should use the options card by showing it to the individual and asking him or her to select the option he or she prefers.

## **F. Description of communication methods listed on the options card**

1. Certified and qualified sign language interpreter  
See GN 00203.012B in this section for the definitions of certified and qualified interpreters.
2. Certified and qualified video remote interpreter (VRI)

VRI uses video teleconferencing equipment to provide sign language interpreting services for deaf, hard-of-hearing, or speech-impaired individuals through an offsite interpreter.

3. Social Security employee who is a qualified sign language interpreter

The employee does not need to be a certified interpreter. However, both the individual who is DHOH and the employee conducting the interview must agree the interpreter is qualified.

4. Hand-written notes

5. Lip reading or speech reading

6. Social Security employee, if available, who knows American Sign Language (ASL).

This employee is not a certified sign language interpreter or a qualified sign language interpreter. Currently, employees who know sign language, but are not certified or qualified, can directly communicate with an individual who is DHOH. The employee cannot interpret between the customer and another employee. This option allows the individual to communicate directly with an employee, one-on-one in person, or through video conferencing technology.

7. UbiDuo

The UbiDuo is a portable, two-way communication device that runs on batteries and works similar to text messaging. For instructions on using the UbiDuo, see GN 00203.012G in this section.

8. If the individual who is DHOH indicates he or she prefers another option, refer to GN 00211.001B.2. – Non-Standard Accommodations.

**NOTE:** Advise the individual who is DHOH that he or she may choose one of the currently available options in the interim if he or she would like to conduct business with SSA that day. Otherwise, SSA will need to reschedule the appointment to await a decision from the Center for Section 504 Compliance.

## **G. Procedure for using the UbiDuo to communicate with individuals**

Follow these instructions when a DHOH individual chooses the UbiDuo method to communicate with us.

1. If there is a visitor at the UbiDuo who is not using it, or who is not helping the customer who is using it, ask the visitor to step back from the UbiDuo. This ensures

protection of the person's Personally Identifiable Information (PII) while using UbiDuo.

2. Never connect an UbiDuo device to any workstations or server.
3. Delete any stored conversation after use. Management will be responsible for verifying the deletion of stored conversations after each use. This process ensures the removal of all information, including PII.
4. Secure both UbiDuo devices when not in use. If you need to step away from the interview area, secure both devices to prevent a claimant from leaving the office with the device.
5. Ensure the Auto-Link feature, which allows the UbiDuo to automatically connect to another UbiDuo without permission, is set to Off.

## H. References

- GN 00203.011 Special Interviewing Situations: Limited English Proficiency (LEP) or Language Assistance Required
- GN 00203.000 Interviewing
- TC 10010.020 General Rules for Referrals and Appointments

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To Link to this section - Use this URL:

<http://policy.ssa.gov/poms.nsf/lnx/0200203012>

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