**Subject**: Feedback on FDNY’s Proposed Accessibility Plan for the Deaf Community

Dear FDNY Accessibility Plan Review Team,

Thank you for the opportunity to review and provide feedback on your proposed five-year accessibility plan. I appreciate your efforts to address the diverse needs of New York City residents, including individuals in the Deaf and hard-of-hearing communities. However, I would like to highlight some areas for improvement to ensure that your plan fully meets the needs of this population during emergencies, such as fire evacuations.

**1. Access to Emergency Alerts**

* Ensure all fire alarms and warning systems include **visual alerts**, such as strobe lights, in all areas of buildings, including restrooms, stairwells, and bedrooms.
* Expand the use of **mobile technology** to send real-time emergency notifications in ASL and plain text, ensuring clear and accessible communication during emergencies.

**2. Clear and Inclusive Evacuation Procedures**

* Incorporate **two-way visual communication tools** (e.g., tablets or apps with ASL video interpreters) to facilitate communication between first responders and Deaf individuals during emergencies.
* Include visual signage and clearly marked accessible evacuation routes in all public buildings and multi-story residential facilities.

**3. Community Involvement in Planning**

* Actively collaborate with Deaf advocacy groups, such as NYC Black Deaf Advocates, to ensure that evacuation plans address real-world needs.
* Host regular focus groups or town halls with the Deaf community to gather ongoing feedback and improve accessibility measures.

**4. Training for First Responders**

* Require regular **ASL training** for first responders and provide them with basic tools to communicate with Deaf individuals effectively.
* Include **cultural competency training** to ensure first responders understand the unique barriers Deaf individuals face during emergencies.

**5. Inclusive Fire Safety Drills and Public Education**

* Conduct **accessible public fire drills** with ASL interpreters, captioning, and visual guides to help Deaf individuals practice evacuation procedures.
* Develop ASL video guides for fire safety and promote these on social media and other platforms frequently used by the Deaf community.

**6. Funding and Resources**

* Allocate funding for visual translation tools, interpreters, and accessible communication systems to be available during emergency responses.
* Provide resources for the Deaf community, such as printed and digital fire safety guides, that explain evacuation strategies in plain language and ASL.

Thank you for considering these recommendations. I believe that implementing these measures will greatly enhance the safety and well-being of Deaf and hard-of-hearing New Yorkers during emergencies. I am happy to provide further insights or participate in community discussions if needed.

Sincerely,
Charles Diggines
NYCBDA President