

TRANSCRIPT

Effective Communications with Law Enforcement Officers (Police)

Question 5: Inform Police I'm Deaf

Michael Baer, Emergency and Public Communication Access Program Coordinator

Great, I'm happy to hear that. Really, it's about anything that will assist an officer in letting them know you are Deaf. Both Chief Baran and I have been talking about these visor cards. These were created by the Rhode Island Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. If you need one, please give us a call or email us and we'll be happy to send you one. These are available to you at no cost. These can be very helpful and I'm glad Chief Baran made a point of mentioning it. Now, I've been thinking. There have been several Deaf individuals who have shared their experiences with police officers. Suppose, for example, a Deaf person happens to be just walking down the street and is suddenly approached by police officers or even apprehended with the use of force, just out of the blue. How could a person inform the officers that he/she is Deaf in that situation? I know that doesn't happen often, but how could a person identify oneself as Deaf? Yell? Sign to them? Point to their ears? What kind of clues could you give to police in that situation?

Chief Ted Baran, Director of Campus Security at Gallaudet University

That's an interesting question. That's a good question. And, you're right, it happens rarely. But I do want to let you know that kind of situation, when officers apprehend you like that out of the blue, most of the time that's based on someone who has maybe called the police with a description of a person and you happen to fit that description. Or maybe something has happened in that particular locale and you just happen to be in the wrong place at the wrong time, unfortunately. So, in that situation, the number one thing to do is cooperate. First and foremost, cooperate. Show your hands, even if the officers are approaching, put your hands up immediately. If you show your hands, it might prevent something like that from happening- the use of force. By putting your hands up immediately, you're showing the police that you're not a threat. That's important. If for some reason the officers are telling you to "get down", you can use your hands that are already up in the air and point to your ears to let them know you are Deaf and continue to cooperate. Maybe you will get down on the ground, follow what the officers say. You may even be handcuffed but continue to emphasize that you are Deaf, point to your ears if you can. That will help the situation. Eventually the officers will figure out what's going on when they speak to you and there's no response. Hopefully they will figure it out within a short amount of time that yeah, maybe this person is Deaf. It does happen,

unfortunately. But, that's a part of law enforcement. An officer has to make those kinds of quick decisions and they're not one hundred percent right all the time. But you hope the situation doesn't get worse from there.

