

BULLETIN

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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The HHS Office for Civil Rights and the US Attorney's Office for the District of Connecticut Ensure Effective Communication with Deaf and Hard of Hearing Individuals at St. Francis Hospital and Medical Center

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Office for Civil Rights (OCR) and the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Connecticut (DOJ) announced today that they have jointly entered into a voluntary resolution agreement with St. Francis Hospital and Medical Center (SFHMC) to ensure effective communication and enhance the quality of services for persons who are deaf or hard of hearing.

The matter was initiated by a complaint filed with DOJ alleging violations of Title III of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Specifically, the complainant alleged that SFHMC failed to provide auxiliary aids and services when necessary to ensure effective communication with him during multiple admissions to SFHMC. In cooperation with DOJ, OCR initiated a compliance review of SFHMC with regard to the hospital's policies and procedures for ensuring effective communication with individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing to determine SFHMC's compliance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504). Section 504 and the ADA prohibit SFHMC and other entities covered thereunder from discriminating on the basis of disability and require covered entities to ensure effective communication.

As a result of these investigative efforts, concerns were raised regarding whether the hospital is implementing adequate policies and procedures to ensure effective communication with deaf or hard of hearing individuals. The agreement resolves the OCR compliance review and DOJ complaint investigation.

Under the agreement, SFHMC is obligated to take several critical steps toward improving access to appropriate communication services for deaf and hard of hearing individuals, including: revising its policies and procedures as necessary, revising its training as necessary, and performing an assessment of the need for auxiliary aids and services for patients and their caregivers. SFHMC has also agreed to pay the complainant \$45,000 in compensatory relief. The agreement is effective for three years, during which time both OCR and the U.S. Attorney's Office will monitor SFHMC's compliance.

A copy of the voluntary resolution agreement may be found at:

<http://www.hhs.gov/ocr/civilrights/activities/agreements/stfrancis/vra.pdf>

People who believe that an entity receiving federal financial assistance has discriminated against them (or someone else) may file a complaint with OCR at:

<http://www.hhs.gov/ocr/civilrights/complaints/index.html>

Complaints may also be instituted with DOJ pursuant to Title II of the ADA (public hospitals) or Title III of the ADA (private hospitals).

Those interested in finding out more about the ADA may call the Justice Department's toll-free ADA information line at 800-514-0301 (TDD 800-514-0383) or visit <http://www.ada.gov>.

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