



## **Registro de Intérpretes para Sordos de Puerto Rico, Inc.**

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### **FEDERAL GOVERNMENT CONTINUES TO DISREGARD PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN THE RECOVERY FROM HURRICANE MARIA**

San Juan, Puerto Rico – The Registro de Intérpretes para Sordos de Puerto Rico (RISPRI), Puerto Rico’s sign language interpreter professional association, opposes the decision made by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) on Friday, May 25<sup>th</sup>, to not renew the service contract for sign language interpreting provided by the professional interpreters from Puerto Rico. The interpreting service provided is required under several federal laws, including Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act.

“Federal laws stipulate that local and federal governments must provide access in order to effectively communicate with people who have an auditory disability. FEMA claims that it complies with the law by using video calls and remote interpreters outside of Puerto Rico. The influence of the Spanish language and Puerto Rican culture on the sign language spoken by deaf people in Puerto Rico make Video Remote Interpreting (VRI) an ineffective tool for the unique communication needs of our community. Puerto Rican professional interpreters have expertise in linguistic equivalence that will provide equal access, just as the deaf association Movimiento Autónomo de Sordos stated yesterday.” stated Marina Martínez, RISPRI’s president.

FEMA began hiring professional Puerto Rican interpreters at the end of September of 2017 during its response phase as a means to provide assistance to the deaf community following Hurricane Maria. The deaf community was left without communication due to the lack of electricity and stable Internet connection throughout Puerto Rico. VRI is an interpreting service provided through audiovisual equipment that also relies on a stable, high-speed Internet connection, and the services can be provided from anywhere in the United States with the use of American Sign Language.

“The deaf community is very diverse with very different levels of literacy competencies because of the inequality of educational services that address our needs. This results in many deaf people not understanding written communication that is published, not to mention the many who may only communicate using idiosyncratic signs. VRI is also a problem, because with just the slightest drop in internet speed, the image blurs, and that leads to misunderstandings between interpreters and deaf people. Many of us demand that we are provided with professional interpreters in person and that way clear communication will not only be effective, but also efficient.” said Eugenio Sastre, deaf and the Director of Deaf Community Relations on RISPRI’s Board of Directors.

RISPRI is a non-profit membership organization that plays a leading role in advocating for excellence in the delivery of interpretation and transliteration services between people who use sign language and people who use spoken language in Puerto Rico. This association strives to advocate for best practices in interpreting, professional development for practitioners, and for the highest standards in the provision of interpreting services for diverse users of languages that are signed or spoken in Puerto Rico. In collaboration with the Deaf community, we educate the community at large about the importance of hiring qualified sign language interpreters and about the role of sign language interpreters in order to ensure quality interpreting services for the Deaf community in Puerto Rico.

For more information or any more questions, you may visit our website [www.rispri.org](http://www.rispri.org), communicate by email at [rispri@rispri.org](mailto:rispri@rispri.org), or you may call Marina Martínez, President, at (787) 923-9551.

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