

As a law student interning with DIG, I spoke with a client recently and I was frustrated to learn that there are attorneys who disregard their duty to communicate with clients who are deaf. When someone is already in a difficult situation, it's hard to believe that a lawyer would make the situation even worse, by refusing to provide an interpreter for a family member that needed one. Although I realize that some lawyers would have a difficult time paying for interpreters, most lawyers should be able to afford to pay for an interpreter for the clients that need them.

It is a basic tenet of professional responsibility that Lawyers have an ethical duty to communicate with their clients, and most lawyers try to fulfill that duty. There are unique challenges when trying to communicate effectively with a client is deaf. However, it's still that lawyer's responsibility to handle those challenges.

If a lawyer refuses to provide a qualified interpreter, it forces the deaf client to make a difficult choice. If he or she files a complaint against the attorney, to require them to provide an interpreter, the attorney may no longer be pleasant to work with. If you want to work with them despite their refusal, and do not file a complaint, the client is left paying for the interpreter yourself. This is a situation that seems very unfair because the client is paying more money for the same service that hearing clients are receiving.

When you're calling a lawyer, it's usually because you need help with a legal issue you're having. You're likely already in a difficult place in your life, and in need of legal advice or assistance. For an attorney to be able to help you, you need to be able to communicate with them, so they can get all the information they need to help you, and so you can understand the process, and ask any questions you have.

I know that most lawyers are willing to fulfill their duty to communicate, and will provide a qualified interpreter when one is needed. For the attorneys who are unwilling, I hope that they become better educated on their duty to communicate with all clients, including those who are deaf. In South Florida, there are many sign

language interpreters who are available to assist, and with the technology that exists now, which allows you to communicate with an individual who is deaf through a sign language interpreter via the video relay phone service, or in person through video relay interpreting with a webcam on your workstation, there is no reason for any deaf person to not have the equal opportunity to effectively communicate with their attorney.