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### **Deaf Justice Coalition Announces Launch of NYPD Pilot Program to Improve Accessibility for Deaf and Hard of Hearing New Yorkers**

New York, NY – April 17, 2017 – The Deaf Justice Coalition announced the launch of a pilot program today by the New York City Police Department (NYPD) aimed at improving access to law enforcement services for people who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing (DHH). Several years of negotiations between the Deaf Justice Coalition, a New York-based coalition of d/Deaf rights advocates, and the NYPD led to the creation of this program in three police precincts in Manhattan, Queens, and Staten Island. The program will require the NYPD to provide in-person, on-site American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters upon request and to equip officers with handheld tablets for video-based ASL interpreting.

New York City is home to more than 200,000 people who are DHH. While police departments around the country have implemented programs to ensure language access for people who are DHH, the NYPD has to date lagged behind, Deaf Justice Coalition advocates report.

“We shouldn’t be treated like second-class citizens—least of all by the NYPD,” said DJC member Chris Tester. “But that’s the reality when we’re left with basically no way to communicate with law enforcement. It’s humiliating.”

The NYPD has been plagued in recent years by a string of high-profile lawsuits arising from its failure to provide interpreters during arrests and other police interactions. On repeated occasions, DHH New Yorkers have been arrested by the NYPD because of communication failures that could have been avoided had the NYPD provided interpreter services.

Deaf Justice Coalition advocates also warn that the absence of interpreter services from the NYPD, resulting in ineffective communication, has prevented DHH New Yorkers from reporting crimes.

“Being able to contact the police if they’re in trouble is something that most people take for granted,” said Deaf Justice Coalition member Nicolyn Plummer, who advocates for domestic violence survivors. “Whenever I hear about another person who hasn’t been able to report abuse because the NYPD doesn’t have an ASL interpreter on hand, I’m outraged. The NYPD should be, too.”

Deaf Justice Coalition advocates are hopeful that the NYPD’s launch of the new program today will be a significant step forward in providing equal access to police services to people who are DHH.

“The Americans with Disabilities Act prohibits state and local governments from discriminating on the basis of disability in the services and programs that they offer,” said Deaf Justice Coalition member Antony Gemmell, an attorney with the Disability Justice Program at New York Lawyers for the Public Interest. “This pilot program is an important first step in bringing the NYPD into compliance with its obligations under the law.”

The Deaf Justice Coalition will monitor the NYPD’s implementation of the pilot program in the 9th, 115th, and 121st police precincts, covering portions of Manhattan, Queens, and Staten Island, while advocating for the program to expand citywide. The Deaf Justice Coalition has also worked with the NYPD to develop trainings and policies related to the pilot program.

“The NYPD’s years-long collaboration with the Deaf Justice Coalition has resulted in a much-anticipated pilot, launching on Monday, April 17,” said Susan Herman, the NYPD’s Deputy Commissioner of Collaborative Policing. “The pilot will test innovative ways for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community to access NYPD services, and input from the DJC has been instrumental in identifying best practices and preferred services. Our goal is to continue our relationship with them as we move beyond a pilot to city-wide access to new services.”

“We are thrilled to partner with the NYPD to ensure that this crucial program is a success in these three precincts, but more is needed.” said Deaf Justice Coalition member Sean Gerlis, President of the Empire State Association of the Deaf. “All DHH New Yorkers deserve to have equal access to law enforcement services, and we will keep fighting until they do.”

### **About the Deaf Justice Coalition**

The Deaf Justice Coalition aims to address a wide range of pressing issues impacting New Yorkers who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing. The Deaf Justice Coalition’s advocacy centers around access to police, emergency, and other government services for people who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing.

The Deaf Justice Coalition’s member organizations include Barrier Free Living, Bronx Independent Living Services The Center for Independence of the Disabled, New York, Civic Association of the Deaf, Harlem Independent Living Center, Empire State Association of the Deaf, Legal Services New York City, The New York Center for Law & Justice, New York City Metro Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, New York City Black Deaf Advocates, New York Lawyers for the Public Interest, and Staten Island Club of the Deaf

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