



Petitions Committee

House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA

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Rt Hon Oliver Dowden CBE MP
Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport
Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport
100 Parliament Street
London
SW1A 2BQ

23 April 2020

Dear Oliver

I am writing to you about the Government's response to e-petition 301461, which called on the Government to require British Sign Language (BSL) interpreters for emergency announcements on TV.

My Committee has agreed that the Government's response to this petition does not adequately respond to the petitioner's request, so I am writing to ask you to provide a revised response that more directly responds to the petition's clear request for the Government to require British Sign Language (BSL) interpreters for emergency announcements on TV, and gives detailed explanation of why the Government has not arranged its own BSL interpretation for ministerial statements on coronavirus.

Other governments, across the world and the UK, have arranged interpretation of ministerial statements on coronavirus, with a translator standing alongside the speaker. This means that, whether people view the announcement on broadcast television or other means such as YouTube, it is accessible for users of BSL. It is not clear why the UK Government has not done the same, or even acknowledged in its response to this petition that this is something the Government could do.

Making the work of Government accessible is essential, and I'm sure you'll agree with the creator of this petition that this is particularly true for emergency announcements and information about how people can protect themselves. This has been reflected by the House through the excellent work led by Mr Speaker to ensure that, wherever possible, Government statements on coronavirus in Parliament are live translated into BSL.

The House of Commons, and the Petitions Committee in particular, has made accessibility a priority in recent years. In 2018 we arranged the first ever simultaneous BSL interpretation of a Westminster Hall debate on an e-petition calling for BSL to be part of the National Curriculum. Other Committees have also arranged for BSL interpretation of their proceedings, and the House of Commons has now launched a trial of live BSL interpretation of Prime Minister's Questions. I welcome the Government's support of these innovations in Parliament, but the Government should be leading on this when it comes to its own activities, rather than relying on broadcasters to provide their own interpretation.

As well as requiring a revised response, I urge the Government to take time to reconsider its decision not to facilitate BSL translation itself for coronavirus statements in order to ensure that people who use BSL are able to fully participate and receive crucial information and updates during this difficult and concerning time.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading 'Catherine' in a cursive script.

Catherine McKinnell MP
Chair of the Petitions Committee