



Department of Social and Family Affairs

Minister Coughlan Acts To Maintain Sign Language Service

Mary Coughlan T.D., Minister for Social and Family Affairs, today acted to prevent the closure of Irish Sign Link, and its interpretation service, by providing it with emergency funding of 25,000.

"Irish Sign Link is the only sign language interpretation service in this country and has the support of the Irish Deaf Community. I am gravely concerned that it is facing closure due to lack of funding. The support I'm providing will enable it to maintain its current services until long-term funding is found," said Minister Coughlan.

"The ability to express ourselves, communicate, have access to information and services is a fundamental right, it is therefore essential that Irish Sign Link's work is sustained, particularly in this European Year of People with Disabilities," said Minister Coughlan.

"Irish sign language is the daily language of approximately 5,500 people, and when family members are included this figure grows to 20,000," added Minister Coughlan.

The National Rehabilitation Board set up Irish Sign Link in 1998. In early 1999 it was established as a company with charitable status by the National Association for the Deaf, the Irish Deaf Society and the Irish Association of Sign Language Interpreters. It is the sole interpreting service in Ireland and is the only body providing registered sign language interpreters for deaf people and public bodies providing services to deaf people.

ENDS 22nd December 2003