

Hall County Jail Utilizes New Technology For Hearing Impaired Inmates

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Hall County Jail Utilizes Communication for Hearing Impaired Inmates

Recently, the Hall County Sheriff's Office Jail Division installed and began using the latest technology available in order to accommodate the communication needs of inmates with impaired hearing. With the introduction of the Sorenson ntouch VP, inmates of the Hall County Detention Center will now be able to take advantage of the latest technology when communicating with family and friends on their visitation list.

Visitation can often bring about complicated issues for those who want to communicate with their loved ones even in a standard correctional setting. Distance has often been an obstacle, waiting long periods of time before getting a face-to-face meeting and noisy environments have been previous complaints when conducting a standard inmate visit. To further confound the situation, imagine the face-to-face aspect being the only means of communicating with your loved one who has an impairment, difficulty or loss of hearing.

Through the installation of Sorenson's ntouch VP video visitation technology, the Hall County Jail streamlines this process for those with impaired hearing issues. Sergeant Chris McNeal relates that "Whenever an inmate with impaired hearing is set for their visit, they are given a booth in which a video monitor facilitates a translator, passing along the communication over a phone line to the inmate's family. As with a standard phone conversation, the translator will reciprocate to the inmate by hand-signing their response."

Video Relay Service (VRS) is the most "functionally equivalent" communication system for deaf individuals who use sign language (ASL). VRS is an electronic communication option that closely simulates a conversation between two hearing people, something the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) calls "functional equivalency." Sorenson created the first videophone designed specifically for use by deaf individuals. The Sorenson videophone, Combined with Sorenson VRS®, revolutionized communication for the deaf, empowering them to conduct real-time conversations with hearing people. Ioannis Sirakoulis, Sorenson Communications district manager for Georgia, stated that "Sorenson is pleased to provide communication access for all deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals. Currently, we provide Video Relay Service (VRS) for schools, government agencies and now, for inmates at Hall County Jail. The ntouch® VP videophone gives inmates functionally-equivalent communication access – communication equal to hearing inmates who communicate to the outside the world."

VRS service at the Hall County Jail, is funded through the Interstate Telecommunications Relay Services Fund and administered by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). No taxpayer monies were used in the funding of this new service. Hall County Sheriff, Gerald Couch, concludes "Technology has come a long way. The Administration and Staff of the Hall County Jail continuously work toward gaining access to all the latest tools available. This is so that everyone incarcerated in our facility has equal access to the provisions set forth in their constitutional rights. For those whose primary communication is sign language, we are pleased to offer this tremendous service."

To learn more on Sorenson's hearing impaired communication, you may visit their website at

<http://www.sorensonvrs.com>. You may also find general information regarding Jail visitation, schedule and policy, at the Hall County Sheriff's Office website at www.hallcounty.org/sheriff.