

March 29, 2025

Chief of Police Roanoke Police Department  
348 Campbell Avenue SW  
Roanoke, VA 24016

**RE: ADA/504 Concerns and Excessive Force by Roanoke Police**

Dear Chief Scott Booth,

We, the Board of Directors of the National Association of the Deaf (NAD), are writing to express our profound concern regarding the recent arrest of Mr. Anton Brown, a Deaf individual, by officers of the Roanoke Police Department. It has come to our attention that Mr. Brown was subjected to excessive force because he could not hear verbal commands issued by Roanoke officers.

This incident represents a clear violation of Mr. Brown's rights under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, which require law enforcement agencies to provide effective communication and auxiliary aids to individuals with disabilities, including those who are Deaf or hard of hearing.

**Details of Concern**

Based on the information provided to us, Mr. Brown was approached by Roanoke police officers who issued verbal commands that he could not hear due to his deafness. When Mr. Brown did not respond to these commands—because he physically could not hear them—officers escalated the situation and restrained him using physical force. This response demonstrates a fundamental misunderstanding of how to properly interact with Deaf individuals and represents a serious failure in the department's training protocols.

We must emphasize that Roanoke is home to a substantial Deaf community, with many Deaf and hard of hearing residents living, working, and contributing to the city. Given this significant Deaf presence in the jurisdiction, there is absolutely no excuse for Roanoke officers to be unprepared for interactions with Deaf individuals. The Roanoke police department should have been well aware of this demographic and should have had appropriate training and protocols in place long before this incident occurred.

**Legal Framework**

We wish to remind the Roanoke Police Department that the ADA and Section 504 require law enforcement agencies to ensure effective communication with individuals who are Deaf or hard of hearing. The U.S. Department of Justice has issued specific guidance on law enforcement interactions with Deaf individuals, including the need to recognize signs of deafness and to provide appropriate auxiliary aids and services. Courts have consistently held that failure to provide reasonable accommodations to Deaf individuals during police encounters constitutes discrimination under federal law.

## **Requested Actions**

In response to this incident, we expect the Roanoke Police Department to take immediate action. A thorough investigation into the circumstances surrounding Mr. Brown's arrest must be conducted, with accountability for any officers who violated department policy or federal law. A formal apology to Mr. Brown for the trauma and indignity he experienced is necessary.

Furthermore, comprehensive training for all officers on proper interactions with Deaf and hard of hearing individuals is essential. This should cover recognition of deafness, appropriate communication techniques, and legal obligations under the ADA and Section 504. The department should develop and implement clear policies and procedures for interactions with Deaf and hard of hearing individuals, in consultation with the Deaf community and experts in disability rights. We also strongly recommend establishing a community advisory board that includes Deaf representatives to provide ongoing guidance on disability-related issues.

## **Offer of Assistance**

The NAD stands ready to collaborate with the Virginia Association of the Deaf, the Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services Center, and the Roanoke Deaf and hard of hearing communities to assist Mayor Cobb and the Roanoke Police Department in developing effective training materials and protocols for interactions with Deaf individuals. Our organization has extensive experience in this area and is well-equipped to provide valuable resources and expertise.

A meeting with community stakeholders is requested, and we seek to work with department leadership within the next 30 days to discuss this incident and our recommendations for preventing similar occurrences in the future.

This incident has caused significant distress not only to Mr. Brown but to the entire Deaf community. We trust that you and your department share our commitment to ensuring that all citizens, regardless of disability status, are treated with dignity and respect by law enforcement officers.

Sincerely,

Lisa M Rose

President, National Association of the Deaf  
On behalf of the NAD Board of Directors

Cc: Joseph Cobb, City of Roanoke Mayor  
Eric Raff, Director, Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (VDDHH)  
Bettie Thompson, Executive Director, Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services Center  
Donna Graff-Viall, President, Virginia Association of the Deaf  
Dr. Brenda Hale, President, Roanoke Branch NAACP  
WDBJ7.com  
WSLS.com  
WFXRTV.com