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IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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DEAF CITIZEN SUES OKLAHOMA LEGISLATURE

Oklahoma City, OK – Johnny Reininger, Jr., a deaf Oklahoman filed suit today against the State of Oklahoma and the Oklahoma Senate and House of Representatives for the failure of the Oklahoma legislature to caption hearings and other proceedings streamed online.

The complaint contends that the Oklahoma Senate and House of Representatives maintain websites that show live feed of legislative hearings and other proceedings. This live video feed is not captioned. Archives of the videos are not captioned either. Captions are necessary for deaf and hard of hearing citizens to access the audio content of these videos.

Reininger is an active and involved citizen with a particular interest in following state proceedings. “I need to know what is happening in my state in order to be fully informed at the polls and to fulfill my civic responsibilities,” said Reininger. His repeated requests that the proceedings be captioned were refused by the legislature. Reininger said, “When our state government refuses to caption their proceedings, they are choosing to exclude deaf people like me from civic life.”

“Participation in government is an essential American right,” stated Howard Rosenblum, CEO of the National Association of the Deaf. “And participation is not possible if government proceedings are not open and accessible to everyone including deaf and hard of hearing people.”

“The Americans with Disabilities Act requires state legislatures to ensure full and equal access for individuals, including individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing,” said Michael Steven Stein, an attorney with Stein & Vargas, LLP, one of the firms representing the plaintiffs. “When a state government chooses to exclude a class of citizens from access to their proceedings, they are standing on dangerous ground.”

Reininger is represented by the National Association of the Deaf, Stein & Vargas, LLP, and the Oklahoma Disability Law Center.

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The National Association of the Deaf is the nation's premier civil rights organization of, by, and for, deaf and hard of hearing individuals in the United States.

Stein & Vargas, LLP is a civil rights firm based in Washington, D.C. and committed to the principle that all people have full and equal access to all parts of society.

The Oklahoma Disability Law Center is a system of protection and advocacy for people with disabilities in the State of Oklahoma.

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