

Resolution No. 235-2026**By Council Member:** Jones

An emergency resolution endorsing and urging the Ohio General Assembly to enact House Bill 461 that requires all county and municipal correctional facilities and state correctional institutions to provide deaf, hard of hearing, or severely speech-impaired inmates access to teletypewriters at no cost.

WHEREAS, one of the goals of the American criminal justice system is to reform and rehabilitate offenders so they may become productive members of society; and

WHEREAS, our criminal justice system also has a responsibility to ensure the basic needs of people who are incarcerated are met; and

WHEREAS, among those needs is the need to communicate with others; and

WHEREAS, while they are incarcerated, prisoners are allowed to make limited calls to family members, friends, legal counsel, and important contacts unless there are legitimate security or safety concerns; and

WHEREAS, inmates who are deaf, hard of hearing, or severely speech-impaired cannot use telephones to call outside contacts as other inmates do and need alternative communications devices; and

WHEREAS, denying prisoners the opportunity to communicate can constitute a human rights violation under international human rights standards; and

WHEREAS, providing effective communication upholds an inmate's right to free speech and Fourteenth Amendment guarantees of due process and equal protection; and

WHEREAS, many municipal and county correctional facilities, and state correctional institutions do not provide prisoners who are deaf, hard of hearing, or severely speech-impaired with alternative opportunities to communicate with outside contacts, such as teletypewriters; and

WHEREAS, Ohio State Representative Terrence Upchurch introduced House Bill 461 in Ohio's 136th General Assembly on September 17, 2025; and

WHEREAS, House Bill 461 will require all municipal and county correctional facilities and state correctional institutions to provide inmates who are deaf, hard of hearing, or severely speech-impaired with access to teletypewriters at no cost and prohibit all county and municipal correctional facilities and state correctional institutions from

denying an inmate who is deaf, hard of hearing, or severely speech-impaired access to a teletypewriter; and

WHEREAS, passage and implementation of House Bill 461 will help restore human dignity to the affected incarcerated individuals and will improve rehabilitation by ensuring inmates can maintain meaningful communication with loved ones and legal representatives; and

WHEREAS, this resolution constitutes an emergency measure for the immediate preservation of public peace, property, health or safety, now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF CLEVELAND:

Section 1. That this Council endorses and urges the Ohio General Assembly to enact House Bill 461 that requires all county and municipal correctional facilities and state correctional institutions to provide deaf, hard of hearing, or severely speech-impaired inmates access to teletypewriters at no cost.

Section 2. That the Clerk of Council is directed to transmit copies of this resolution to all members of the Ohio General Assembly.

Section 3. That this resolution is hereby declared to be an emergency measure and, provided it receives the affirmative vote of two-thirds of all the members elected to Council, it shall take effect and be in force immediately upon its adoption and approval by the Mayor; otherwise, it shall take effect and be in force from and after the earliest period allowed by law.

Passed March 2, 2026.

Effective March 4, 2026.