



Media Release
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NT DISABILITY MINISTER MOCKS SIGN LANGUAGE

The deaf community is outraged by the actions of Northern Territory Minister for Disability Services, John Elfernck, who pretended to use sign language as part of his ridicule of the Deputy Leader of the Northern Territory Opposition Gerry McCarthy during a debate yesterday.

The incident happened during an exchange when a special committee was debating changes to local government legislation. Minister Elfernck mockingly used made up hand signals when Mr McCarthy asked the Minister for Local Government Bess Price to move closer to the microphone as he wears hearing aids and couldn't hear her first comment.

"This is disgraceful and offensive. I'd expect this sort of behaviour from a group of louts at the pub, but certainly not from the Minister for Disability Services in a public arena," said Mr Kyle Miers, Chief Executive of Deaf Australia.

"Its shocking that the Minister for Disability Services has so little respect for the deep connection that the deaf community has with their language and primary communication mode," says Mr Miers, "and it is also very worrying that the Minister would prefer to mock a person with a hearing loss rather than ensure access for him."

The position of Minister for Disability Services requires understanding of and empathy for people with disability, as well as their values and communities.

Despite his subsequent apology, Deaf Australia believes that Minister John Elfernck has clearly shown his lack of understanding and respect for the deaf community and is asking for him to resign from this portfolio so it can be given to a Minister who is more suited to the role.

Relevant media:

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-03-25/nt-disability-services-minister-appears-to-mock-hearing-aids/6348006>

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