Version
as at 10 July 2026

New Zealand Sign Language Act 2006

Public Act	2006 No 18
Date of assent	10 April 2006
Commencement	see section 2

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Note

The Parliamentary Counsel Office has made editorial and format changes to this version using the powers under subpart 2 of Part 3 of the Legislation Act 2019.

Note 4 at the end of this version provides a list of the amendments included in it.

This Act is administered by the Ministry of Disabled People.

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Courts and tribunals before which New Zealand Sign Language may be used

1 Title

This Act is the New Zealand Sign Language Act 2006.

2 Commencement

This Act comes into force on the day after the date on which it receives the Royal assent.

Part 1
Preliminary provisions

3 Purpose

The purpose of this Act is to promote and maintain the use of New Zealand Sign Language by—

(a) declaring New Zealand Sign Language to be an official language of New Zealand; and

(b) providing for the use of New Zealand Sign Language in legal proceedings; and

(c) empowering the making of regulations setting competency standards for the interpretation in legal proceedings of New Zealand Sign Language; and

(d) stating principles to guide government departments in the promotion and use of New Zealand Sign Language.

4 Interpretation

In this Act, unless the context otherwise requires,—

Deaf community means—

(a) the distinct linguistic and cultural group of people who are deaf and who use New Zealand Sign Language as their first or preferred language; and

(b) people who are deaf and who identify with the group of people referred to in paragraph (a)

government department means a government department named in Part 1 of Schedule 1 of the Ombudsmen Act 1975

interpretation, in relation to New Zealand Sign Language, means—

(a) the expression in New Zealand Sign Language of words spoken in English or Maori or both; and

(b) the oral expression in English or Maori or both of messages expressed in New Zealand Sign Language

legal proceedings means—

(a) proceedings before any court or tribunal named in the Schedule; and

(b) proceedings before any coroner or associate coroner; and

(c) proceedings to inquire into and report on any matter of particular interest to the Deaf community before—

(i) a commission of inquiry under the Commissions of Inquiry Act 1908; or

(ii) a tribunal or other body having any of the powers of a commission of inquiry under any other enactment; or

(iii) an inquiry to which section 6 of the Inquiries Act 2013 applies

that is required to inquire into and report upon any matter of particular interest to the Deaf community

Minister means, subject to any enactment, the Minister who is, with the authority of the Prime Minister, for the time being responsible for the administration of this Act

New Zealand Sign Language or **NZSL** means the visual and gestural language that is the first or preferred language in New Zealand of the distinct linguistic and cultural group of people who are deaf

presiding officer, in relation to any legal proceedings, means the Judge or other person who is presiding over the proceedings

translation, in relation to New Zealand Sign Language, means—

(a) the written expression in English or Maori or both of messages expressed in New Zealand Sign Language; and

(b) the signed expression in New Zealand Sign Language of words written in English or Maori or both.

Compare: 1987 No 176 s 2

Section 4 **legal proceedings** paragraph (b): amended, on 5 April 2023, by section 36 of the Coroners Amendment Act 2023 (2023 No 8).

Section 4 **legal proceedings** paragraph (c): replaced, on 27 August 2013, by section 39 of the Inquiries Act 2013 (2013 No 60).

5 Act binds the Crown

This Act binds the Crown.

Part 2
New Zealand Sign Language

Recognition

6 New Zealand Sign Language to be an official language of New Zealand

New Zealand Sign Language is declared to be an official language of New Zealand.

Compare: 1987 No 176 s 3

7 Right to use New Zealand Sign Language in legal proceedings

(1) In any legal proceedings, any of the following persons may use New Zealand Sign Language, where the person's first or preferred language is NZSL:

- (a) any member of the court, tribunal, or body before which the proceedings are being conducted:
- (b) any party or witness:
- (c) any counsel or other person representing a party in the proceedings:
- (d) any other person with leave of the presiding officer.

(2) The right conferred by subsection (1) to use NZSL does not—

- (a) entitle any person referred to in that subsection to insist that any person who is not an interpreter for the purposes of the proceedings address or answer him or her in NZSL; or
- (b) entitle any such person other than the presiding officer to require that the proceedings or any part of them be recorded in NZSL.

(3) Where the presiding officer in any legal proceedings is aware that any person entitled under subsection (1) to use NZSL in those proceedings intends to do so, the presiding officer must ensure that a competent interpreter is available.

(4) Where, in any proceedings, any question arises as to the accuracy of any interpretation or translation from NZSL into spoken or written language or from spoken or written language into NZSL, the question must be determined by the presiding officer in such manner as the presiding officer thinks fit.

(5) Regulations made under this Act and rules of court or other appropriate rules of procedure made under any enactment may require any person intending to use NZSL in any legal proceedings to give reasonable notice of that intention, and generally regulate the procedure to be followed where NZSL is, or is to be, used in such proceedings.

(6) Any such regulations or rules of court or other appropriate rules of procedure may make failure to give the required notice a relevant consideration in relation to an award of costs, but no person may be denied the right to use NZSL in any legal proceedings because of any such failure.

Compare: 1987 No 176 s 4

8 Effect of recognition

(1) Subject to section 7, section 6 does not create any legally enforceable rights.

(2) Nothing in section 6 or section 7—

(a) affects any right that any person has, otherwise than by virtue of those sections, to seek, receive, or impart any communication in NZSL; or

(b) affects the right of any other linguistic community in New Zealand or the right of any person to use the language of that community or person.

Compare: 1987 No 176 s 5

Principles to guide government departments

9 Principles

(1) A government department should, when exercising its functions and powers, be guided, so far as reasonably practicable, by the following principles:

(a) the Deaf community should be consulted on matters relating to NZSL (including, for example, the promotion of the use of NZSL):

(b) NZSL should be used in the promotion to the public of government services and in the provision of information to the public:

(c) government services and information should be made accessible to the Deaf community through the use of appropriate means (including the use of NZSL).

(2) Consultation carried out by a government department under subsection (1)(a) is to be effected by the chief executive of the government department consulting, to the extent that is reasonably practicable, with the persons or organisations that the chief executive considers to be representative of the interests of the members of the Deaf community relating to NZSL.

(3) The purpose of the principles in subsection (1) is to promote access to government information and services for the Deaf community, but nothing in subsection (1) is to be read as conferring on the Deaf community advantages not enjoyed by other persons.

10 Reporting

(1) The Minister may from time to time report on the progress being made in implementing the principles set out in section 9.

(2) A report under subsection (1) may be included in any report referred to in clause 7 of Schedule 1 of the Healthy Futures (Pae Ora) Act 2022 on the progress being made in implementing the New Zealand disability strategy.

Section 10(2): replaced, on 1 July 2022, by section 104 of the Pae Ora (Healthy Futures) Act 2022 (2022 No 30).

Section 10(2): amended, on 10 July 2026, by section 41(1) of the Healthy Futures (Pae Ora) Amendment Act 2026 (2026 No 40).

Miscellaneous provisions

11 Review of operation of Act

(1) The Minister must, as soon as is practicable, 3 years after the date on which this Act comes into force, require a report to be prepared on—

(a) the operation of this Act since its commencement; and

(b) whether any amendments to the scope and contents of this Act are necessary or desirable.

(2) The Minister must ensure that persons or organisations that are representative of the interests of the members of the Deaf community are consulted on the matters to be considered in the report.

(3) The Minister must present a copy of the report to the House of Representatives.

12 New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990 not affected

Nothing in this Act affects the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990.

Regulations

13 Regulations

(1) The Governor-General may from time to time, by Order in Council, make regulations for all or any of the following purposes:

(a) prescribing the standards of competency that a person who is to act in legal proceedings as an interpreter of NZSL must attain:

(b) providing for any other matters contemplated by this Act or necessary for its administration or necessary for giving it full effect.

(2) Regulations made under subsection (1)(a) must include (or provide, among other things, for the determination and publication of) the criteria by which the competence of a person to act in legal proceedings as an interpreter of NZSL may be assessed.

(3) Regulations under this section are secondary legislation (*see* Part 3 of the Legislation Act 2019 for publication requirements).

Legislation Act 2019 requirements for secondary legislation made under this section

Publication	PCO must publish it on the legislation website and notify it in the *Gazette*	LA19 s 69(1)(c)

Presentation	The Minister must present it to the House of Representatives	LA19 s 114, Sch 1 cl 32(1)(a)
Disallowance	It may be disallowed by the House of Representatives	LA19 ss 115, 116

This note is not part of the Act.

Section 13(3): inserted, on 28 October 2021, by section 3 of the Secondary Legislation Act 2021 (2021 No 7).

Schedule
Courts and tribunals before which New Zealand Sign Language may be used

s 4

A. Courts

The Supreme Court

The Court of Appeal

The High Court

The District Court

The Employment Court

The Family Court

The Youth Court

The Maori Land Court

The Maori Appellate Court

The Environment Court

B. Tribunals

The Waitangi Tribunal

The Employment Relations Authority

The Human Rights Review Tribunal

The Motor Vehicle Disputes Tribunals established under section 82(1) of the Motor Vehicle Sales Act 2003

The Tenancy Tribunal

The Disputes Tribunal established under the Disputes Tribunal Act 1988

Schedule: amended, on 1 March 2017, by section 261 of the District Court Act 2016 (2016 No 49).

Notes

1 General

This is a consolidation of the New Zealand Sign Language Act 2006 that incorporates the amendments made to the legislation so that it shows the law as at its stated date.

2 Legal status

A consolidation is taken to correctly state, as at its stated date, the law enacted or made by the legislation consolidated and by the amendments. This presumption applies unless the contrary is shown.

Section 78 of the Legislation Act 2019 provides that this consolidation, published as an electronic version, is an official version. A printed version of legislation that is produced directly from this official electronic version is also an official version.

3 Editorial and format changes

The Parliamentary Counsel Office makes editorial and format changes to consolidations using the powers under subpart 2 of Part 3 of the Legislation Act 2019. See also PCO editorial conventions for consolidations.

4 Amendments incorporated in this consolidation

Healthy Futures (Pae Ora) Amendment Act 2026 (2026 No 40): section 41(1)

Coroners Amendment Act 2023 (2023 No 8): section 36

Pae Ora (Healthy Futures) Act 2022 (2022 No 30): section 104

Secondary Legislation Act 2021 (2021 No 7): section 3

District Court Act 2016 (2016 No 49): section 261

Inquiries Act 2013 (2013 No 60): section 39

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