STATE OF CONNECTICUT

Commission on the Deaf and Hearing Impaired

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Testimony of – Stacie J. Mawson, Executive Director
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Raised Bill 5797 - An Act Concerning the Availability of Qualified Interpreter Services

Good Morning, Senator Harris, Representative Vallano, and distinguished members of the Human Service Committee. My name is Stacie Mawson. I am the Executive Director of the Commission on the Deaf and Hearing Impaired. I am here today to testify in favor of raised Bill #5797 - An Act Concerning the Availability of Qualified Interpreter Services. I want to thank the Committee for raising this important bill.

The purpose of Raised Bill #5797 is to protect the Civil Rights of Deaf and Hard of Hearing people in legal and administrative situations.

The passage of this bill actually puts language back into statute that was in statute prior to 1997.

In 1997 the Commission on the Deaf and Hearing Impaired worked collaboratively with the deaf community and legislators to establish statewide registration of interpreters for the deaf. This registration mandated the specific credentials required to work as an interpreter in the State of Connecticut. Interpreter Registration was established to provide quality assurance; it was passed into law as part of an Omnibus Bill on school construction. Unfortunately, it replaced the language in CDHI's Statute which provided individuals the right to equal communication access. Removal of the original language was never intended.

During the past nine years we have witnessed a significant decline in the provision of communication access during criminal investigations

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and arrests. At least once a week, CDHI receives a request for a court arraignment in which there was no request made for the arrest from a police department. It is estimated that only 2% of all individuals who are arrested are provided with an interpreter during the actual arrest.

The Judicial Department regularly schedules certified sign language interpreters through CDHI for appearances of deaf and hard of hearing individuals.

The passage of this bill will accomplish several important issues.

- It will ensure the continuation of communication access for deaf and hard of hearing people in all of the courts of the Judicial Branch for criminal and civil actions.
- It will ensure individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing communication access during a criminal investigation involving an interrogation as a victims, witnesses or suspect.
- It will ensure communication access for deaf and hard of hearing parents and guardians of minors who are being interviewed as a victim, witness or suspect.
- It will ensure communication access for deaf and hard of hearing employees during proceedings before administrative or executive board.

This Bill would restore language that was written to protect the rights of individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing. CDHI's statute would be made whole.

I wish to offer my sincerest appreciation to the members of the Human Service Committee for your time and attention on this important issue.

Please support our efforts to return communication access that was once in state statute. I would welcome any questions you may have.