

3-16-09

Members of the GAE Committee:

I would like to express my opposition to the elimination of the Commission on the Deaf and Hearing Impaired (CDHI) as proposed in H.B. 6375. As a Coordinator of Deaf Services for the Department of Labor and Commissioner on CDHI's Advisory Board, I see first hand the value that CDHI brings to the deaf and hearing impaired community in accessing critical benefits and services from state agencies. The Department of Labor maintains a strong partnership with CDHI in ensuring that deaf and hearing impaired individuals receive the same access to services that every non disabled customer receives. Far too often state agencies make operational decisions without regard to the needs of people with disabilities. They do this for a number of reasons: cost saving measures, convenience etc. For a deaf or hearing impaired individual, these decisions can result in significant barriers in accessing vital services. Example: In Connecticut, individuals who file for unemployment insurance benefits are given the option of filing their claim by phone or the internet. This process is very convenient for the majority of the population but for a deaf individual with literacy issues, the process is difficult if not impossible without the assistance of certified sign language interpreter. Fortunately, DOL's partnership with CDHI has allowed us to provide deaf and hearing impaired individuals with the reasonable accommodation (the use of a certified sign language interpreter) they are entitled to under the ADA and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. I ask you to continue to support CDHI as a necessary agency who bridges the gap in the delivery of state services to the deaf and hearing impaired community. Thank you.

Bridget Kemmling  
State Equal Opportunity Officer  
CT Department of Labor