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Public Hearing – March 13, 2014, Proposed Update of Interpreter Law

Connecticut is home to many charlatans....communication charlatans...some intentional, some inadvertent. Friends interpret for friends...family members interpret or talk for their family members.....supervisors ask co-workers to explain job related duties and policies to their Deaf co – worker.....and some individuals who pawn themselves off as professionals as a con to gain some personal advantage [money or celebrity]. It's very nice and commendable for persons to communicate with Deaf persons in the innocent day to day events, but when circumstances require clarity and in depth understanding, when negative consequences can result, an interpreter is needed. All too often, the use of interpreters is circumvented for convenience or financial reason. For example there are people who take a sign language class and then are hired in public schools where an interpreter is needed. The novice is hired as a "sign language specialist". How and why does that happen? When a "sign language specialist" is hired instead of a certified interpreter, the school systems save money through a false job title and the mainstreamed child suffers; when an inexperienced

interpreter who may be recently credentialed because he/she graduated from a two [2] year college program enters a hospital emergency room, communication is skewed; the results can be horrific. The “Consent Decree” mandate initiated years ago can attest to that fact, as seven [7] Connecticut hospitals faced and lost law suits adjudicated by the Department of Justice because of mis-communication or lack of provision of professional credentialed interpreting services. When an inexperienced sign language interpreter enters a courtroom or a deposition, those of us who know the business of interpreting are fearful as to the possible outcomes. Educational, Judicial, Health Care, Mental Health these are all specialty areas where the proposed Law sets standards for interpreters. Our state has not provided training mechanisms or policed non-credentialed persons calling themselves “sign language interpreters”. The proposed amendments to the current law and the recommendations cited in the Law will serve to protect our Deaf Citizens.

My name is Keith Vinci and I've been involved with the Deaf community my entire 60 years; my mother and father were Deaf. I have been a lifetime professional in the field of Deafness. I served 34 years of continuous State employment providing direct service to Deaf consumers. I worked 29 of those years for the State Commission on the Deaf and Hearing Impaired [CDHI]. CDHI was the first state agency in the nation to recognize the uniqueness of Deafness and provide direct ancillary service to those Deaf citizens in their struggle to become independent and maintain independence. CDHI was established to serve as the State agency advocating the civil and disability rights of persons Deaf. This very same agency served as the continuing model of effectiveness and efficiency in Deaf services for the nation until the previous two administrations decimated the agency despite it being fiscally sound and cost effective. At CDHI, I served as the Job Development and Placement Specialist, and later, until my retirement in 2009, as an Interpreter Co-coordinator. Currently, I serve the interpreting community as the President of the Connecticut Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf [CRID], the state chapter of RID. As CRID President, I would like to report that CRID supports the proposed bill along with CAD and CCOSD [with some minor revisions noted].

During most of my tenure at CDHI, the agency was the sole provider of certified interpreters for the Deaf statewide.

Interpreter qualifications and skills were assessed before hire as part time state employees in the CDHI Interpreting Unit. Quality control of interpreters and interpreting services were strictly maintained within CDHI. Today, mostly resulting from the whittling down of CDHI mentioned above, and the simultaneous encouragement of privatization of interpreting services, there are numbers of competing companies, individuals, and organizations vying for interpreting business. Each with their own “interpretations” as to what allows them to work in Connecticut as an interpreter.

Many years ago Connecticut professionals in the field of Deafness, mostly from ASD and CDHI recognized the need for ASL and sign language interpreters trained and skilled to meet the high demand for interpreting services in Connecticut. Interpreting standards had been established by the National Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf [RID], the certifying professional organization of interpreters. These standards were set and interpreters throughout the nation worked toward RID certification. Certification meant that one who is “certified” had the competency to interpret in a variety of settings. As a result, Deaf persons accessing certified interpreters felt reasonably confident that an RID certified interpreter would comfortably and effectively work an interpreting assignment.

With the advent of competing interpreting resources varying levels of competency arose, the first Task Force was established

and the Interpreter Law subsequently was passed into Law. Today we're discussing the updating of that Interpreter Law. Much time has passed and the field of interpreting has progressed and changed. This law allows for improvements and insures that only those properly trained and credentialed can interpret. The law also insures that vendors and consumers adhere to the concept that Deaf persons can advocate for themselves as long as they have communication access.