

Chairpersons Senator Moore and Representative Abercrombie, Vice-chairs Senator Slossberg and Representative McGee and Members of the Human Services Committee.

There are several bills before the legislature this session that have something to do with hearing loss. While all of them are important this testimony will focus on one, Raised Bill 6765, An Act Concerning Interpreter Qualifications. As written, this bill is not sufficient. As stated by the Connecticut Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf Task Force in their response to Commissioner Porter's report and in their letter to the co-chairs and members of the Human Service and Education Committees, without the establishment of an Interpreter Standards and Monitoring Board, and the assignment of a staff person to provide the necessary supports for the Board to function and enforce the statute, nothing will change.

I am MarySue Owens, and I have been a professional and nationally certified interpreter for 30 years. Having deaf family and friends I have watched firsthand how the non-deaf world has treated those in our society who have a hearing loss. While we would like to think that with local and federal legislation and technical advances access has improved, that is not the reality. Please allow me to illustrate.

The year is 1985 and as a deaf person living in Connecticut you know that regardless of your need or concern you can contact the Commission on the Deaf and Hearing-Impaired (CDHI) and get answers and/or guidance from professional staff who are fluent in your language.

When you visit your physician, meet with an attorney, or want to speak with your legislator, a qualified interpreter is provided.

If your deaf child needs an interpreter to participate fully in school, or play for the school's or community's basketball program, a qualified interpreter is provided.

When your family celebrates a wedding or mourns a loved one's death, a qualified interpreter is provided.

If you need mental health counseling or case management you know that both are provided at CDHI and the worker can communicate with you in your communication style.

You can show up at an emergency room knowing that they will call for a qualified interpreter whether the patient is you or someone for whom you are caring.

If there is a problem at work, CDHI has a jobs counselor who will come and work with you and your employer to help resolve the issue, which is often related to misunderstandings and/or a lack of awareness and education.

Should you experience a situation where police are involved, you are confident a qualified interpreter will be provided.

When the governor appears on television to present his budget or to address an emergency you know a qualified interpreter is going to be at his side.

If, at any time, you have a concern about an interpreter's skills or credentials you only need to contact CDHI.

If you are frustrated because a business or agency has not provided an interpreter CDHI will work with you to educate them on the law.

It is 2015, 30 years later and as a deaf person living in Connecticut you have no central source of information or support. When you need to see a doctor, an attorney, or other provider you need to be prepared to educate them that it is their responsibility to provide access as they regularly expect that if you can't communicate with them you will bring your own. You also need to let them know where they can secure interpreting services, if they choose to provide them.

If your deaf child needs a qualified interpreter in order to understand what his teachers and classmates are saying, you must be well-prepared to fight for this as many schools do not provide a "qualified interpreter" as required in the state statute. If your deaf child wants to participate in her school's or community's basketball program, you must be well-prepared to fight as many schools and communities do not feel they are required to provide any interpreter.

When your family experiences a baptism, wedding, or a funeral, it is rare that a qualified interpreter is provided, unless you pay for it yourself.

If you need mental health counseling or case management you are not sure where to go and wonder if they will understand your experiences and frustrations as a deaf person, and if they will provide a qualified interpreter.

When you show up at an emergency room you have no assurance that they will call for a qualified interpreter if the patient is you and less likely if it is someone for whom you are caring.

If there is a problem at work and you are already a DORS client your Rehabilitation Counselor for the Deaf may be able to assist. If not, you may need to contact DORS and apply to be a client, which may take months to be approved.

Should you experience a situation where police are involved you are quite sure a qualified interpreter will not be provided even when they have been informed beforehand that you are deaf.

When the governor appears on television to present his budget or to address an emergency you hope a qualified interpreter is provided and that the cameraperson will keep the interpreter visible at all times so that you know what he is saying.

If, at any time, you have a concern about an interpreter's skills or credentials you have nowhere to go for assistance.

If you are frustrated because a business or agency has not provided an interpreter your only recourse may be to ask the Office of Protection and Advocacy to assist you in bringing a lawsuit, but you know it will not resolve the immediate problem.

Your support of Raised Bill 6765, with the language changes and amendment as recommended by the CRID Task Force, will not give the Deaf and Hard of Hearing people of Connecticut the same supports and access they experienced in 1985. It will, however, give them a place to go to ensure that those who are legally responsible for providing qualified interpreting services are being monitored for compliance. It is a beginning, and it is the right thing to do. Thank you.