

March 17, 2015

To Human Services Committee on Raised Bill 6941

My name is Betsy Hopwood, I am working towards becoming a certified interpreter for the deaf and would like to raise my concerns on the following: Raised Bill 6941 and 6765.

I have been working towards becoming an interpreter for the past six years. It has been a difficult and costly journey. The State of Connecticut already has some of the strictest laws for interpreters in the country. I have a Master's Degree from Wesleyan University and have spend many years, thousands of dollars and countless hours studying to become an interpreter for the deaf. It is a profession that is vitally important and deaf people deserve to have highly skilled and certified interpreters in all aspects of their lives. I have recently taken the National Interpreter Certification exam and hope to be interpreting in the State of Connecticut soon.

My frustration with Bill 6765 is that there are very little opportunities in the State of Connecticut to receive additional training for interpreters. Due to this fact, I have had to travel to other states in order to receive my training. How can interpreters be forced to fulfill more training requirements when training is not offered in the state? The burden of the cost of this additional training would be on the interpreter as well. I think it is imperative that all interpreters adhere to high standards and it's vital to the Deaf community that interpreters have the necessary skills to do their job; however, it is unrealistic to expect additional training when it is not offered in the state of Connecticut. There is already a shortage of qualified certified interpreters in the state and this bill will only expand that deficit. If the goal is to raise the quality of interpreters in the state, this law does little to improve quality. It will only narrow the pool of interpreters by discouraging new people from entering the field and pushing others out of the field. The answer to improving the quality of interpreting is to improve the infrastructure for training. Instead, this bill seems to place further burdens for training and certification without any mechanisms to help interpreters become better trained. The state of Connecticut doesn't even have a single accredited interpreter training program

Bill 6941 will make it so that all state agency interpreting requests will go first through the Department of Rehabilitation Services prior to going through other agencies. My best guess is that this too has been proposed to address quality control. However, the larger problem is that we do not have enough interpreters in the field to service the existing demand. How is requiring organizations to check with DORS first going to solve this problem? This is another example of proposed legislation that does not address the core issue. We do not have enough well-qualified interpreters to service the needs of the Deaf community. Instead of offering a solution that will attract new resources and better train the existing resources, we are going to make a new requirement that prevents organizations from obtaining services directly from the agencies they have been working with for years? This just doesn't make any sense. This will only place new burdens on the organization requesting interpreting services to have to fish around for resources. Again, instead of addressing the root of the problem, we are placing new burdens on everyone involved in the process.

Most importantly, I know many deaf people in our state and most of them have never even heard of either of these bills. The Deaf community will be most impacted by these bills and should be aware of these possible changes. Deaf people are entitled to highly qualified and certified interpreters; the best way to provide the highest quality services is to encourage interpreters to advance their training and offer opportunities, not by creating more laws.

Thank you,

Betsy Hopwood