

Sign Language Interpreter & Transliterators State Registration Act Stakeholder Meeting Summary from May 19th, 2017

Location: 1521 N 6th Street, Harrisburg, Pa 17102; OVR Central Office; 1st floor Conference Room

Time: 10:00am to 3:00pm

Members in Attendance:

Jen Perring (ERCHL); Jessica Bentley-Sassaman (IEPs); Jeanne Bonnes (IRS); Jerry Penna (PSAD); LaTanya Jones (PARID); Shatarupa Podder (PDE); Benjamin Moonan (ODHH); Denise Brown (ODHH); Corrin Zimmerman (Prov. Interpreters) and Deleda Keiser (ODHH)

Absent: John Nice (CDIs); Osvaldo Aviles (AOPC)

Interpreters: Cindi Brown and Nichole Wade

CART: Lorraine Herman

Visitors: Nicole Moran; Harvey Corson; Harry Barnum; Katherine Erving; Matthew Jina; Melissa Hawkins; Grace Shirk-Emmons

Meeting Summary:

Ms. Bentley-Sassaman reached out to the Arizona Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (ACDHH) to inquire about their law and imposing misdemeanor on interpreters that violate the law. ACDHH shared that they have not addressed the possibility of imposing a charge on an interpreter yet. They also shared that there is a range that they utilize, for instance suspending someone's license to interpret in the state. They also impose fines and require interpreters to obtain continuing education in order to get their license back. If they are to consider imposing a misdemeanor charge on an interpreter, they would need to work closely with the Attorney General's office.

The group would like to have Ms. Bentley-Sassaman to follow up with ACDHH with the following questions –

- What are their requirements and guidelines to license their interpreters within the state? How they differ from Pennsylvania's guidelines?
- Who imposes the fines on the interpreters if they violate the law?

Ms. Bentley-Sassaman gathered some information on BEI testing to see if that is something the group may want to add as a certification of recognition for Act 57 in order to become State-Registered. BEI requires, along with being over the age of 18 and no criminal background, 30 college credits in English proficiency. BEI wants to ensure that the prospective interpreter has strong proficiency in English in order to be an interpreter. BEI has 3 different performance testing and the first one is basic which is entry-level. If you pass the basic, you become an entry level interpreter. The next would be advanced and Master BEI. If an interpreter who already has a RID or NAD certification wants to take the BEI, they would need to take the written exam first no matter what. Once they pass the written exam, they can skip the basic performance exam and take the advanced but they cannot take the Master until they pass the Advanced. The BEI test was developed by Arizona and is administered in Texas, Illinois, Missouri, and Michigan. In order for a State to provide BEI testing, they would need to buy the licensing rights to use the test which is very expensive. Then, they would need to find assessors for that state which would require them to go to Texas to take a training to become an assessor. More information from Ms.

Bentley Sassaman will be gathered and discussed during the next meeting such as where are all the assessors located, if the test is local-level, state-level, or national level, etc.

Ms. LaTanya Jones provided the Mentorship committee, under PARID, a list of actual mentorship programs and apprenticeship programs in the United States to gather information from each so the stakeholder group can have a better idea of what is entailed in each program and determine what would be reasonable to have here in Pennsylvania. The deadline that was given to the committee was August 30th. Ms. Bentley-Sassaman recommends contacting Sue Ann Houser from PATTAN to get information of their educational interpreter mentorship program to be included with the rest.

Ms. Jeanne Bonnes, representing all Pennsylvania Sign Language Interpreter Referral Agencies, was able to ask agencies in PA their thoughts on if they would like to see the removal of Section 4(b)5 Request to use a non-registered sign language interpreter form or not. The responses are attached to the minutes for your review. After reviewing the results, some members of the group feel that the request to use a non-registered interpreter form should be kept BUT the regulations need to be changed to ensure that there is no abuse of this section taking place in Pennsylvania. The abuse is when the form is not being used correctly or the deaf person does not understand their rights under the law then the interpreter uses the form to “waive” themselves from any wrongdoing. This does not empower the deaf community and creates a harm when the purpose of the law is to minimize the harm being done to the deaf consumers.

ODHH Staff plans on contacting all the state agencies in the United States to determine if their respective state has something similar to Pennsylvania’s famed Exception #5 Request form which empowers the deaf person to choose to use one who is not registered. Once the information is gathered, it will be shared at the next Stakeholder’s meeting on June 29th, 2017.

Ms. Bentley-Sassaman was able to share with the group that she found out in the current law that it does indicate that due to unlawful practices, the violator of the act can be charged with a misdemeanor.

Mr. Gerald Penna and Pennsylvania Society for the Advancement of the Deaf (PSAD) has agreed with the motion to create a survey for the deaf community to obtain information on how much they understand the Exception #5 Request to use a non-registered interpreter form and how it is being used out in the community. The group also agreed to create a simple, no more than 10 question survey to send out to individual interpreters, the deaf community, interpreter training programs, as well as referral agencies. The purpose of that survey would be to determine how much they understand/know what the law is and how it operates as well as the purpose of the law. A clarification letter written by ODHH was distributed during the meeting which gives us a better understanding of the meaning of Exception #5 Request to use a non-registered interpreter form. The clarification letter is included with the meeting minutes for your review.

From the clarification form, the group agreed that the most meaningful statement is, “It should not be assumed that the person who is deaf prefers the non-registered interpreter each time she/he requests interpreting services. Rather, the individual who is deaf must request the non-registered interpreter each time.”

The group has begun the discussion of creating a simple survey that they will pass along after next meeting. They will discuss the kind of questions that will be asked in order for the group to obtain data

on how many people understand what Exception #5 is and how it is being utilized in Pennsylvania. This survey will help the group determine what would be the most appropriate modification, or amendment, into the regulations and if the removal of exception #5 should happen or not. It is agreed that the more data collected the better the chances are to have something modified that would help Pennsylvania reduce the harm being done to the deaf consumers who use sign language interpreters.