

Sign Language Interpreter & Transliterators State Registration Act Stakeholder Meeting Summary from March 21st, 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:

Osvaldo Aviles (AOPC); Jen Piring (ERCHL); Brian Morrison (IEPs); Jeanne Bonnes (IRS); Jerry Penna (PSAD); LaTanya Jones (PARID); Shatarupa Podder (PDE); Corrin Zimmerman (Prov. Interps); John Nice (CDIs); Benjamin Moonan (ODHH); Denise Brown (ODHH); Deleda Keiser (ODHH)

Visitors:

Harvey Corson (PSAD Executive Director); Melissa Hawkins (Executive Director – DEC); Grace Shirk-Emmons (President of PSAD); Harry Barnum (Deaf Outreach/Advocacy Coordinator – LRI); Mary Ann Corson (PSAD member); Jo Madden (Sorenson); Sarah Zera (Student Intern – Interpreting)

Meeting Summary:

Terri Roth from Disability Advocacy Support Hub (DASH) under the Disability Rights of Pennsylvania presented to the members on “How a bill becomes a law”. Ms. Roth emphasized that nothing happens quickly which means the entire process could take years in order to pass. One thing that will help speed up the process (and make it easier) is if there are no money implications involved in the bill. If the bill is non-controversial, meaning all parties involved have agreed with the language of the bill, that will also help with the process. Once a bill is submitted to either the house or the senate, it must be passed by their respective committees before moving on. In order for the bill to be pushed, it must have co-sponsors who support the bill and want to push the bill in being passed – a champion from each chamber would be helpful in order to push the bill. Since this stakeholder group is working on making changes of the existing law, amending the act, it should make the process much easier. To have a public hearing is a strategic approach to help the case of the bill being passed but it is not required. This should help get the message across on what the group is trying to do in regards to amending the act. It is critical that the stakeholder group consider this approach as there are pros and cons for doing so or not doing so. The point is to help the law pass, not to hold it back. In order to select a sponsor for the bill, the group would need to look for who is in the majority, or a person with power. The bill is more likely to be successful if it is sponsored by the dominant party in both the house and senate. The more sponsors for the bill, especially a balance from both parties, can only benefit the process of the bill. One question that was brought up during the presentation is if the stakeholder group should submit two separate bills – one for the amendments and one for the revolving account which would permit ODHH to maintain the funds from the registration fees from the interpreter for its operations. The revolving account may be able to be modified administratively. If not, the legislative process may be considered in order to pass the revolving account idea. ODHH Staff will establish a meeting with legislative affairs prior to the next session to find out if the revolving account can be done administratively or legislatively.

Member reports/discussion –

Member Jessica Bentley-Sassaman shared two items via e-mail prior to this meeting that can be utilized to develop ideas that support areas in need for amendments. The two documents, one was responses from respective Interpreter Training Programs on questions relating to accepting Deaf students, Act 57 concerns, Alternative methods, extending Provisional Registration, and the provisions for Deaf Interpreters into the act. The 2nd document was a sample of the Educational Sign Language Interpreter Professional Development Plan provided by West Virginia Department of Education. This document is a potential guidance if the group decides an alternative pathway is necessary.

Currently, a concern in regards to the Provisional Registration is that the language of the act indicates that to qualify for provisional registration, one must graduate from an approved Interpreter Training Program with at least an associate's degree. For those who do not have Bachelor's degree but was able to obtain an associate's degree can apply for provisional registration but in order to obtain state-registration, they would need to obtain a Bachelor's degree, in compliance to Registry for Interpreters of the Deaf (RID)'s qualifications, this may not provide sufficient experience and practice for the provisional interpreter in order to successfully pass the performance examination.

ODHH staff shared numbers of current provisional registration interpreters as well as numbers of who was able to comply to the provisional registration requirements and then eventually became state-registered within 3 years – between 5 to 10 were successful. Questions to why such a low number was generated – some provisional registered interpreters do not follow the guidelines in order to be compliance to the provisional registration process – 20 hours of professional studies (P.S. while some proceed to take General Studies (G.S.); some provisional registration interpreters do not renew in timely fashion which enables them to not become provisionally registered; some do not know how and where to earn CEU's; some do not know it was time to re-new even when letters to remind them are already sent to them. With those examples, discussion about whether 3 years is enough or if it should be extended to 5 years. Are the individuals who graduated from an ITP and are provisionally registered dedicated to their chosen profession or are there not enough resources to allow them to succeed within the presented three-year time frame? Should it be expanded to 5 years and allow them more time to pass the exam or would it create the same results as the present model? There are several questions in place that will continue throughout further sessions. LaTanya and Corrin agreed to work together to develop a survey and pass it along to current provisional registration interpreters, state-registered interpreters, interpreter training programs to gather feedback on whether expanding to 5 years will make any difference and increase the number of those able to become state-registered. Or would more provisions need to be included that would provide more support to provisionally registered to succeed within 3 years. The results of the survey will be discussed at the next meeting – 4/21/17. The end goal is to provide the best opportunity for provisionally registered interpreters to pass the performance examination and to become state-registered then want to stay in Pennsylvania. If provisionally registered interpreters are not able to either pass the exam or be in compliance of the act, they will either move out of the state or interpret without compliance of the Act in Pennsylvania which creates more harm.

In regards to the survey that will be prepared by LaTanya and Corrin, questions that will be included, but not limited to, asking interpreters if they feel they get enough support and opportunities within 3 years or would they benefit if it were expanded to 5 years; what kind of support would you like to see that may help provisional registered interpreters build skill and confidence in order to pass the performance examination; did your ITP provide you with details on preparation for after graduation and be in compliance with the Provisional registration guidelines; do they know where and how to obtain CEU's and know the difference between P.S. and G.S.

The concern of exemption #5 was brought up – when a deaf person requests to use a non-registered interpreter then signs a request form. It is not being utilized appropriately out in Pennsylvania – many people refer the form as a “waiver” form when it is not. Also, the deaf person generally never requests a specific individual to interpret for them and the agency will send someone who is not registered for an assignment then ask the deaf person to sign the form accepting their services – completely disempowers them which is exactly the opposite of what this exemption should be for. The provider who will pay for the interpreter services can decline the use of a non-registered interpreter, even after the deaf person specifically makes a request of the individual, because they are under obligation to provide effective communication and may feel more confident using a state-registered interpreter.

Another issue regarding the exemption #5 is that more and more non-registered interpreters are accepting more work than registered interpreters because deaf individuals appreciate non-registered interpreter's attention – may not adhere to Code of Professional Conduct (CPC) so they can become the “helper” of the deaf individual rather than a professional. While non-registered interpreters may not be obligated to follow CPC, are not required to earn CEU's for professional development which requires out of pocket fees, more and more state-registered interpreters are feeling dis-respected and under-utilized in favor of the agency and/or the deaf individual. This may push some qualified interpreters to move out of state which is not what we want to see. How can the group address this concern and provide more opportunities and support for the state-registered interpreters and implement more accountability to the non-registered interpreters as well as the agency who sends them out without being formally requested by the deaf individual? The deaf individual may not understand their rights under the act which may require more education but the act is much more complicated to explain directly. Which is why more accountability should be on those who should be complying the act because what is happening is that certain groups are “taking advantage” of the deaf community and not empowering them. Some say it is time to include referral agencies into the act and hold them accountable to comply with the act.

The next meeting is scheduled for April 21st, 2017 from 10:00am to 3:00pm at OVR Central Office; 1521 N 6th Street in Harrisburg, Pa. The meeting will take place in the 1st floor conference room.

Public members are welcomed to observe the meetings but are not permitted to make any comments or ask questions.