



Governor's Advisory Council for Exceptional Citizens (GACEC)
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MEMORANDUM

DATE: April 29, 2022

TO: The Honorable Members of the Delaware General Assembly

FROM: Ann C. Fisher, Chairperson
GACEC

RE: **House Bill No. 364 State Registry for Interpreters for the Deaf**

The Governor's Advisory Council for Exceptional Citizens (GACEC) has reviewed House Bill No. 364, which will create a registration system for American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters in Delaware. Council **endorses** the proposed legislation.

Currently interpreters for the deaf are not regulated in Delaware. This means that any person with or without professional training can represent themselves as a deaf interpreter and charge for their services. Certain businesses and entities insist that the interpreters they hire have certifications, for example in courtroom settings. However, many times no professional qualifications are required. Using untrained or partially trained interpreters can lead to serious consequences if information is not accurately communicated to the person who is deaf or hard of hearing. Also, individuals who are deaf should not be denied the protections that consumers in other contexts routinely have under the law.

Many states either have a registry for deaf interpreters or have a licensing system. A working group under the auspices of the State Council for Persons with Disabilities (SCPD), an advocacy organization whose mission is to "ensure that individuals with disabilities are empowered to become fully integrated within the community", met for the past seven years to discuss the best path forward for Delaware. The decision was made to require certification through the Registry for the Deaf, Inc. (RID) and maintenance of a registry maintained by the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR), rather than licensure. This decision was based in large part because of the lack of infrastructure to support licensure in Delaware and the need to be able to easily use interpreters from neighboring states. Certification through RID is a national certification. Licenses are state-specific, and certain hoops have to be jumped through to gain reciprocity.

As noted earlier, the GACEC endorses this bill because it agrees with the SCPD that something must be done to regulate this profession. A state registry system will improve the quality of interpreter services,

stop amateurs from providing shoddy services that can cause harm and will provide an avenue for complaints. This legislation shows a concerted, thoughtful effort to develop an approach that will work in Delaware.

Thank you for your time and consideration of our endorsement. Please feel free to contact me or Pam Weir at the GACEC office should you have any questions.