

March 10, 2020

Testimony in Support of SB230
House Subcommittee on Education
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Dear Chairman, Vice Chairwoman, Members of the Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to speak in support of SB 230 today. Kansas is known throughout the country as a leader in matters related to ensuring full access to citizens who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing. When a need arises, Kansas legislators take action. Instituting the Kansas Quality Assurance Screening Test for ASL/English interpreters when there was no other option, establishing the Kansas Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing to ensure the rights of Deaf Kansans, developing Guidelines for Sign Language Interpreters practicing in Educational Settings, enacting the Language Access Bill for Students Who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing are all examples of Kansas legislators taking action to ameliorate untenable situations. While there is still work to do, Kansas has a good track record for addressing issues face on.

Today the issue before you is ensuring that the Kansas Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing has the authority to carry out its charge to protect the communication rights of Deaf and HH Kansans. As a former Teacher of the Deaf, a current veteran ASL/English interpreter, and the parent of a Deaf or Hard of Hearing adult daughter, I have seen first hand the positive impact quality ASL/English interpreting has on the lives of people. Unfortunately, I have also seen the negative impact of ASL/English interpreting provided by those, who, while well meaning, did not have the skill, training, or supervision to effectively facilitate communication at the level required to achieve equitable access to information. In many situations, quality interpreting services have led to students winning competitive scholarships, adults achieving promotions, entry-level workers hired for their first paying job. In other situations, sub-par interpreting services have resulted in people suffering misdiagnoses, being passed over for promotions, or being exonerated from legal charges for which they should have been held accountable.

Allowing the KCDHH authority to carry out its mission to promote and enforce registration for ASL/English interpreters and other communication access service professionals, and to provide regulations for those practitioners, will help to ensure that all Kansans have equal access to quality communication services. It also will give the practitioners, hiring entities, and supervisors a standard to use when deciding who to send to provide services in a given situation. Thank you for listening to my thoughts and for continuing the strong legacy of action for which Kansas is known.