



DISABILITY AND COMMUNICATION ACCESS BOARD

919 Ala Moana Boulevard, Room 101 • Honolulu, Hawaii 96814
Ph. (808) 586-8121 (V/TDD) • Fax (808) 586-8129

LATE

March 31, 2009

TESTIMONY TO THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

Senate Concurrent Resolution 135 – Requesting a Study on the Availability of American Sign Language Interpreters

The Disability and Communication Access Board (DCAB) is a statewide board with seventeen (17) members appointed by the Governor, thirteen (13) of whom are persons with disabilities or family members. The Board's mission is to advocate and promote full inclusion, independence, equal access, and quality of life for persons with disabilities in society. This testimony represents a position voted upon by the Legislative Committee of the Board.

DCAB supports Senate Concurrent Resolution 135 requesting the Legislative Reference Bureau conduct a study on the availability of American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters. DCAB is willing to assist with conducting a survey of working interpreters with other community agencies.

DCAB is the State agency that promulgates administrative rules regarding the use of ASL interpreters, captioners and computer-assisted notetakers. The rules include a recommended fee schedule for payment of communication access providers. This fee schedule has standardized payments of communication access providers by State and county agencies. DCAB also administers a State test to credential interpreters who do not hold national certification, and we maintain a database and distribute a list of communication access providers upon request.

The administrative rules, fee structure and testing procedure have provided a means for State and county agencies to obtain communication services. However, Hawaii still experiences a shortage of interpreters. The interpreter shortage is not unique to Hawaii, but is one experience at a national level. Hopefully, with a survey designed to identify the currently existing barriers that limit the number of interpreters available to work in community settings, perhaps the barriers can be addressed through amending payment practices, administrative rules, fee schedules or whatever is identified.

The current level of technology has created new opportunities for interpreters. More are working as video relay interpreters in lieu of in the community. A balance in how interpreters provide services needs to be developed and maintained to ensure deaf and hard of hearing individuals have equal access in the community.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Respectfully submitted,

CHARLES W. FLEMING
Chairperson

FRANCINE WAI
Executive Director



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

Testimony Presented Before the
Senate Committee on Human Services
March 31, 2009 at 1:15 p.m.

LATE

by

John Morton

Vice President for Community Colleges, University of Hawai'i

SCR 135 REQUESTING A STUDY ON THE AVAILABILITY OF AMERICAN SIGN
LANGUAGE INTERPRETERS

Chair Chun Oakland, Vice Chair Ihara and Members of the Committee:

The University of Hawai'i-Kapi'olani Community College (UH-KCC) fully supports the intent of SCR 135. Despite numerous concerted efforts to increase the number of qualified American Sign Language/English interpreters, their limited availability in the State of Hawai'i and across the nation remains a critical issue.

In 2000, Jan Fried, program coordinator for the American Sign Language/Interpreter Education program, and Nancy Bridenbaugh, director of the Gallaudet University Regional Center and I participated in discussions that culminated in the report, "Shortage of ASL-English Interpreters in the State of Hawai'i". As a result of that study and receipt of a US Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs grant, the College established an Associate of Science degree in Interpreting: Educational and a Certificate of Completion in Interpreting. UH-KCC is firmly committed to supporting the communication needs of the Deaf, Deaf-Blind and hard of hearing communities by preparing individuals for careers in interpreting.

While the number of qualified and credentialed interpreters has dramatically increased in K-12 settings, the numbers available to work with Deaf adults has steadily declined over the last several years. This decline can be attributed to several factors and, as such, this may be the opportune time for the Legislative Reference Bureau to survey working ASL/English interpreters and conduct a comprehensive study about this matter. Recently, the American Sign Language/Interpreter Education program has once again participated in focus group discussions to address the acute shortage of qualified interpreters who work as private contractors.

Kapi'olani Community College will fully cooperate with the Legislative Reference Bureau during the study and consult with them to formulate recommendations that can result in the increase of qualified American Sign Language/English interpreters.

Testimony to the Senate Committee on Human Services
March 31, 2009

**SCR 135-REQUESTING A STUDY ON THE AVAILABILITY OF AMERICAN
SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETERS**

My name is Sabina Wilford and I am submitting testimony on behalf of Hawaii Interpreting Services (HIS). While HIS supports the intent of the resolution, we propose some amendments. A study identifying that there is a shortage of interpreters states the obvious and not the best use of State and community resources. It is already known that there is a national shortage of American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters and HIS has statistics, from two years of work in Hawaii, of unfilled jobs to support this shortage. However, perhaps convening a task force of stakeholders to discuss and identify solutions and implement remedies to increase the number of ASL interpreters in the community would be a better use of State and community resources.

As a referral agency HIS is often confronted with the dilemma of not filling the request or sending an interpreter who is less qualified for the job because a more qualified interpreter is unavailable. Sometimes no interpreter is better than someone filling the job who has marginal interpreting skills or who exhibits unethical behavior. The deaf and hearing client's communication needs are not met, and the interpreter is given a false sense of security in his/her skills. The community's pool of qualified and ethical interpreters needs to be expanded so that deaf and hearing people, including agencies, have options and do not have to settle for less than quality communication access services.

Completion of any Interpreter Training Program (ITP) is the only factor required to produce a skilled interpreter who is able to meet the majority of the community needs. The making of an interpreter requires not only course work, but must be accompanied by hands-on and supervised job experience. Similar to other professions, during an internship the novice can learn the skills he/she needs while under the supervision of a more experienced professional who will ensure accurate job execution. A paid internship for local and mainland novice interpreters would offer a stepping stone into the community interpreting world. It would also complement the Kapiolani Community College ITP program.

Mainland interpreters often vacation in Hawaii or come on a trial basis to see if there is enough work in Hawaii to earn a reasonable living. Many return to the Mainland and are frustrated about not being compensated adequately or in a timely manner by hiring agencies. Streamlining the payment process so timely reimbursements are provided would ensure interpreters are able to support themselves as independent contractors. In the past, many qualified interpreters have left the profession or the state because of the very issue.

HIS suggests efforts be made to strengthen outreach and community education, and to implement protections for hiring agencies. As independent contractors, interpreters often

can and do set their own rates and conditions due to the high demand for their services. Unfortunately, not all interpreters have an accurate and objective understanding of their skill set, nor do they follow the Professional Code of Conduct established by the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID). In addition, both the deaf person and the hiring agency may be vulnerable and can be taken advantage of by this type of unprofessional and unethical practices. HIS suggests the Disability Communication Access Board continue to educate agencies about suggested rates for interpreters. Perhaps an agency similar to the Better Business Bureau could be established so hiring bodies can check before hire interpreters. This may be an avenue for the task force to pursue.

RID has a grievance process for consumers who have received unsatisfactory services. While HIS is not encouraging grievances, it is strongly suggesting education be conducted to the deaf and hearing communities about their rights. Again, too often people are afraid to express concerns or ask questions because they fear being accused of not providing an interpreter, so the agency accepts less than satisfactory interpreter services.

Thank you for your time and attention. HIS offers support to any effort that strives to improve and maintain quality ASL interpreting services in Hawaii. Perhaps the best way to accomplish this goal is to convene a task force of stakeholders to begin the discussion to find solutions related to how to attract and increase the number of qualified and ethical interpreters to Hawaii to serve the local deaf and hearing communities.

Sincerely,

Sabina Wilford
ASL Interpreter and Owner
Hawaii Interpreting Services