



A Deaf Owned Business

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January 24, 2020

Senator Molly Baumgardner, Chairperson
Senate Committee on Education
State Capitol, Room 224-E
Topeka, KS 66612

RE: Testimony in Support of SB 230

Dear Senator Baumgardner and Members of the Senate Education Committee,

ASL Connections, LLC is a Deaf owned interpreting agency based in Olathe, KS. We provide interpreting services to the community and also are one of the vendors with the Kansas Department for Children and Families – Vocational Rehabilitation Services Department providing job placement/coaching and case coordination services.

I pride myself in only contracting with freelance interpreters who meet the criteria set forth by the Kansas Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (KCDHH). When the commission re-evaluates its standards by attempting to raise the bar and make changes to reduce harm to the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, we follow. It is an ethical and humane response to a field in which profession has a huge impact on an individual's (consumer's) life in terms of health, financial, and legal aspects (life/death, hire/fire, guilty/not guilty). When one is an agency providing sign language services in the state of Kansas or a person just freelancing, KCDHH is "the boss". Unfortunately, not everyone sees it this way which leads to serious acts of potential harm to Deaf and Hard of Hearing Kansans.

Interpreting is a profession in its own right. The education, certification/licensure process, adherence to continued education (CEUs), specialties, and oversight is very similar to those who are employed in Social Work, Education, Nursing, and other fields where services are provided to marginalized and vulnerable populations. There is a skill set level in which interpreters are to abide by following the Code of Professional Conduct by only accepting and performing assignments within their abilities and within the standards provided by KCDHH. These standards have been in place for YEARS and are expected to be followed and adhered to, however, they are merely looked at as "just a guideline". If one does not follow it, what are the consequences? There are none.

KCDHH years ago was held in high regard with a registry in place that was strictly adhered to, certified interpreters paid to be on the registry, had their names posted on the registry, took pride in it, and the like. However, over the years, the profession grew, the standards needed to change, more focus and dissection of the current statutes occurred and the loopholes were found – thus backlash occurred. This is where SB 230 and the proposed changes are such a necessity in eliminating the loopholes, putting integrity back into the profession and putting the power back into KCDHH where it

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was originally intended and I hope KCDHH do its job with strict oversight. Those who are intentionally and non-intentionally abusing the profession can be stopped.

As a Deaf person, I do have to rely on interpreters for my own personal needs in health care, law/tax offices and in the school setting to keep abreast of my child's progress to name a few. There are places that have good policies in place to where appropriate interpreters are employed and then again, places that have no idea about the profession and just blindly contract with whatever agency/person who advertises itself as providing interpreting services. It is not their fault, they do not know what they don't know, however, it puts their entity at risk. If all interpreters and agencies were within the KCDHH "watchdog" status that is within the SB 230 context, I think this extra protection would be appreciated and puts them at less risk. I happen to be a professional Deaf person with a strong educational background and know how to self-advocate and recognize when my message is not conveyed appropriately and take measures to assure my health and safety is not compromised (it has almost been a few times with error and omissions happening). Statistically, I am not the majority and since this happens to me quite often, I cannot even comprehend how it is happening to others who do not have my privileges.

Upon reading SB 230, I breathe a sigh of relief in what can be!!! Just LAST WEEK, I received an application for a supervision plan from a person applying to be a provisional interpreter and I flat out declined it as I was privy to information that he had sexually assaulted 3 individuals in the past 7 years but was never convicted because his victims were mentally unable to provide concrete evidence and there were no witnesses (one was drunk, 2 were classified as cognitively challenged/language deprived) and he was unable to touch the grounds of Kansas School for the Deaf. I based my decision on that factor as the applicant confirmed the KSD ban was true and my agency contracts with KSD and other state entities, so my decision was easy. There are no "laws" to protect my decision, only my gut and sense of humanity and responsibility. SB 230 has a clause/statute - (f)2 which hit this situation on the nose as it states "...has not demonstrated to the commission's satisfaction that that such person has been sufficiently rehabilitated to merit the public trust". Having already read the SB 230, I felt even more justified in my decision making and I notified KCDHH just out of respect.

KCDHH is aware and I feel safe knowing that for ME, however, what about the other agencies who feel they do not have to involve KCDHH in their hiring process? Many agencies providing onsite and Video Remote Interpreting are owned by hearing people who do not know sign language and the culture and just rely on their contracted interpreters to carry out the assignments with local, state and federal entities without having met them, assessed their skills, knowing if they are registered or not, and the like. This is a very scary and dangerous scenario which in fact exists and the passage of SB 230 would put a huge dent or even eliminate this harmful practice.

Please do Kansas proud, protect our Deaf and Hard of Hearing Kansans, support KCDHH in the rightful authority, and pass SB 230.

Respectfully,

Bonnie Gobin, MS, CDI
Owner

CC: Kansas Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing