



# KEN SKOWRONSKI

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 82<sup>nd</sup> ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

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November 30, 2017

Dear Chairman Neylon and members of the committee on Jobs and the Economy,

I truly want to thank you for holding this public hearing today on Assembly Bill 589, which relates to the regulation of sign language interpreter services and creates a licensure program administered by the Sign Language Interpreters Examining Board. The past two years my staff and I worked with Representative Brostoff and his staff to coordinate Deaf Legislation and Lobby Day. It was during that event this year that constituents from all over the state came to share their stories and among other things, advocate for this bill's passage.

The efforts of the Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Interpreting Communities to improve the lives and safety of those in their community is what lead us to develop this legislation. Nobody knows and understands the needs of the community better than they do. In situations where time and safety are critical, it's important for those in the deaf community to receive the proper information.

Earlier this year, during a press conference warning Floridians of the dangers of Hurricane Irma, residents were encouraged to seek shelter on higher ground. But for residents who were deaf or hard of hearing, they saw the inappropriately dressed sign language interpreter sign the words "pizza" and "bear monster."<sup>[1]</sup>

Now, we may chuckle over bad sign language interpretation, but for many individuals, not getting the information clearly during a dangerous time could be disastrous. The slight difference in the words being signed could be life and death. That why improving the licensure program for sign language interpreters is so important, and why this bill will go a long way to improve that.

Assembly Bill 589 replaces the current licensure program for sign language interpreters licensed by the Department of Safety and Professional Services with a licensure program administered by the Sign Language Interpreters Examining Board, which is created in the bill. That board will consist of three deaf, hard of hearing, or deaf-blind individuals, three experienced sign language interpreters who are licensed under the bill, and one individual who is not deaf, hard of hearing, or deaf-blind and has obtained the services of a sign language interpreter on behalf of an individual who is deaf, hard of hearing, or deaf-blind themselves. Nobody knows and understands the reasoning behind the board better than the consumers of the services.

That is why we are so happy to see so many of them here today. We are happy to take any questions, but we would like to note that we have many experts that are here today that we would like you to hear from as well.

<sup>[1]</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/17/us/sign-language-interpreter-irma.html>

STATE REPRESENTATIVE  
**JONATHAN BROSTOFF**  
19TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

**Testimony on AB 589**

Relating to: regulation of sign language interpretation services  
November 30, 2017

Thank you Chair Neylon and committee members for considering Assembly Bill 589, which reforms licensing for sign language interpreters.

Sign language interpreters provide many essential services for our neighbors who are deaf, deaf-blind, or hard of hearing. Sometimes their work is more informal and requires less technical expertise, such as when an interpreter accompanies an individual to a community event. Other settings require a higher level of expertise due to the technical language and high stakes of the interaction, such as interpreting in an emergency room or a courtroom setting.

AB 589 recognizes this reality, restructuring the current system for licensing sign language interpreters to create different tiers of qualification: intermediate and advanced. This change would permit more interpreters to more rapidly attain licensed status, while providing protections for the people who rely on them in the workplace, in their personal lives, and in legal or medical settings.

This bill also creates the Sign Language Interpreters Examining Board, which will periodically identify needed updates to ensure the body overseeing the licensing process has a complete understanding of the needs of sign language interpreting services. The board will have a mixed membership made up of three members who are deaf, deaf-blind, or hard of hearing, three members who hold an interpreter license, and one member who has hired an interpreter on behalf of another person.

There have been great strides made on behalf of deaf rights in Wisconsin. AB 589 continues this effort by protecting the deaf community from substandard interpreters, increasing access to essential services in the deaf community, and providing flexible, knowledgeable, and representative oversight of the profession. We all want to make sure that our deaf friends and neighbors, brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers, sons and daughters, are provided with the best services possible. AB 589 is an essential step in that direction.

Thank you to all the deaf community members and the Wisconsin Association of the Deaf. Thank you to the interpreters and the Wisconsin Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf. Thank you to Representative Skowronski, his staffer Sarah, Representative Kleefisch and Senator Testin. And to everyone else who worked so hard to create this important bill and help guide it through the legislative process, thank you.

Thank you again, chair and members, for your consideration. I'd be happy to answer any questions now or in the future as this bill advances through the legislative process.



# PATRICK TESTIN

## STATE SENATOR

**DATE:** November 30, 2017  
**RE:** Testimony on 2017 Assembly Bill 589/Senate Bill 465  
**TO:** The Assembly Committee on Jobs and the Economy  
**FROM:** Senator Patrick Testin

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Thank you to Chairman Neylon and the members of the committee for hearing my testimony on Assembly Bill 589/Senate Bill 465, which I've authored with Representatives Brostoff and Skowronski. We authored this bill to accomplish three main goals – we want to increase the number of sign language interpreters in the state, we want the members of the deaf community to know they are dealing with qualified interpreters in all situations – especially medical and legal ones, and we aim to give the deaf community a better forum in which to express grievances.

Though established in 2010, the current interpreting licensure system in Wisconsin is badly in need of reform. Statutorily, it must utilize a test – the Wisconsin Interpreting and Transliterating Assessment – that is widely acknowledged to be out of date, and it uses timeframes in its licensure renewal requirements that have caused qualified interpreters to leave the field. Less than three months ago, Wisconsin lost 10% of its interpreter workforce because of this structure. For the deaf community, this is much worse than an inconvenience. They are losing their mode of communication.

Currently, Wisconsin has four licensure tiers – restricted deaf interpreters, restricted hearing interpreters, renewable deaf interpreters, and renewable hearing interpreters. The restricted levels generally exist for newer graduates. Current law limits these practitioners to two license renewals and requires them to be an Associate or student member of the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, Inc. (RID). Restricted deaf interpreters are required to complete RID testing, even though that is not the only national certification available. Restricted hearing interpreters are required to pass a written RID examination.

Our legislation makes several changes. We would introduce hearing intermediate and deaf intermediate licenses to replace the two restricted licenses. These licenses would be permanently renewable and they would not require membership in the RID. Deaf intermediate licensees could choose to pursue training from either the RID or the Board for Evaluation of Interpreters (BEI). The written examination requirement for hearing intermediate interpreters would be eliminated. The increased flexibility that these changes create would encourage more people to enter the profession and create a larger pool of competent practitioners.

At the same time, we want the deaf community to feel confident that when they hire an interpreter for critical situations – relating to the health care or legal systems – they are getting a

qualified, advanced practitioner. That is why we are transitioning the renewable deaf and renewable hearing licenses to deaf advanced and hearing advanced licenses. At this advanced level, we increase the educational requirements to ensure proficiency and reliability.

Finally, this bill creates a structure that will be able to better gather feedback on interpreter performance from the deaf community. There have been very few complaints filed about interpreter performance. Unfortunately, this is not due to a lack of incidents. Rather, the current system inadequately meets the needs of the deaf community. The complaint process is difficult for a deaf individual to navigate, and many are not even aware that there is a system set up to accept complaints. This bill establishes the Sign Language Interpreting Examining Board, which would be made up of both interpreters and members of the deaf community. Because of its ability to communicate effectively, this board would be able to collect legitimate grievances and administer justice in cases where interpreters have failed their clients or operated fraudulently.

Licensure often comes under attack – and rightly so – because the proposals come from practitioners of a profession that seek to limit the ability of others to enter the profession. This bill is different. Its concepts come from practitioners and consumers with the goal of growing the profession. The deaf community has provided the primary input, and my colleagues and I have introduced this bill to make sure that their message is delivered and their needs are met.

Thank you for your consideration.

Scott Walker  
Governor



DIVISION OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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Linda Seemeyer  
Secretary

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November 30, 2017

Assembly Committee on Jobs and the Economy

Assembly Bill 589

WI Department of Health Services: Testifying for Information Only

Good morning Chairman Neylon and members of the Committee on Jobs and the Economy,

My name is Amber Mullett and I am the Director of the Office for the Promotion of Independent Living, which houses the Office for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing at the Department of Health Services. I started my career in State service 10 years ago as a sign language interpreter, therefore I can attest to the fact that issues related to communication access and the provision of qualified sign language interpreters are important not only to me, but the Department as a whole.

We can all agree that access to the most qualified sign language interpreters is vital for individuals who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Deaf-Blind. The Office for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing often receives calls from individuals who share with us unfortunate situations that occur as a result of sign language interpreters who do not possess the minimum qualifications to practice. We also are acutely aware that there are areas of our State where access to a qualified interpreter is challenging. We agree that there is an opportunity for us to take a holistic look at the issues being discussed, but would like to raise a few concerns with the proposed legislation, AB 589, being put forward to address these concerns. While these concerns come largely from the department, we have also heard similar concerns that sign language interpreters and deaf and hard of hearing consumers have expressed to us.

First, it might be helpful to provide a little background to committee members on how Wisconsin's current licensure law for interpreters came about. Shortly after I started working with the Department of Health Services, the Deaf and Interpreter communities came together from across the state to address similar issues related to a lack of qualified interpreters available throughout our state. As a result of extensive work by sign language interpreters, Deaf and Hard of Hearing community members, stakeholders, agency partners and legislators, 2009 Wisconsin Act 360 passed with bi-partisan support, creating a sign language interpreter licensure in our state. This Act ensured that interpreters in Wisconsin would be expected to improve their knowledge and skills in order to practice as an interpreter. This Act also created the Sign Language Interpreter Council that brought together sign language interpreters, Deaf and Hard of Hearing Community members and agency representatives to develop Administrative Rules and a Code of Unprofessional Conduct that would help ensure that sign language interpreters adhered to an agreed upon set of common ethical standards.

While we understand the desire to improve upon what was passed in 2009 in an attempt to further improve access to interpreter services, we are concerned that the proposed changes in AB 589 could inadvertently reduce the quality of sign language interpreters in our state, undoing the years of work that went into the current licensure system. Our current licensure system ensures that sign language interpreters improve their knowledge and skills in order to take and pass advanced skills tests that demonstrate their ability to effectively practice in a variety of settings. Only once an interpreter demonstrates these advanced skills will they be able to obtain a renewable license to continue working in a variety of settings in our state. AB 589, however, appears to lack a similar incentive that would require sign language interpreters to improve base-line skills if they choose to license at the intermediate level. As I mentioned previously, many of the complaints we receive regarding sign language interpreters is due to the interpreter not possessing the necessary skills to interpret effectively. By creating a system that reduces the educational standards and removes the requirement for sign language interpreters to demonstrate advanced skills, we are concerned AB 589 could unintentionally exacerbate one of the main problems its supporters are trying to solve.

Furthermore, with the goal being to improve access to qualified sign language interpreters across the state, we are concerned that AB 589 could also unintentionally lead to more severe shortages for qualified sign language interpreters in rural areas, particularly in the healthcare and legal services fields. Whereas the current model ensures that all interpreters are making strides to improve their knowledge and skills thus increasing the likelihood that a qualified interpreter is available no matter where you live, the system proposed in AB 589 could lead to coverage gaps if not enough interpreters decide to gain the skills necessary to practice in a healthcare/legal setting. Additionally, while we understand the desire to ensure the highest competency for healthcare/legal settings, we are concerned there may be other important services that people in who need an interpreter for would prefer to have someone with an advanced skill set, such as financial and other important services.

Beyond some of the concerns regarding the quality of services and access to services, I would also like to highlight a couple other potential concerns. The bill would require sign language interpreters to submit duplicate continuing education paperwork to the State, document volunteer and mentorship hours if used, and obtain and carry three different credential verifications. The bill would also create a new board at DSPS. We are concerned that the makeup of the board does not require a majority of members to have a professional background or training in a profession they would be overseeing, which could create potential conflicts of interest. According to data we have from DSPS, a total of 7 complaints have been filed since the current licensure law was put into place in 2010. Again, while we understand the concerns the authors are trying to address, we are concerned that the new system would add bureaucracy and administrative burden to a process without a substantial benefit for deaf, hard of hearing, or deaf blind consumers.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. In closing I would like to reiterate that we share the goals of the authors of this legislation and would like to continue working with them on ideas to improve the quality of and access to high quality sign language interpreters in Wisconsin.

# Sign Language Interpreters Council

## Additional Resources

Apply to Serve

Meeting Schedule, Agendas and Minutes

Suggest an Agenda Item

Statutes and Administrative Code

## Related Links

A-Z Profession List

Check for Pending Rules

Orders and Disciplinary Actions

Professional Assistance Procedure

Monitoring

File a Complaint

## Contact

Sign Language Interpreters Council

DSPS

PO Box 8366

Madison, WI 53708-8366

(608) 266-2112

Email for questions:

[dspds@wi.gov](mailto:dspds@wi.gov)

The Sign Language Interpreters Council works with the Department of Safety and Professional Services as outlined in Wis. Stat. § 440.032.

Executive Director: Dan Williams

## Members

The Sign Language Interpreters Council consists of the Secretary of the Department of Safety and Professional Services or their designee, and 8 members appointed by the Governor and confirmed by Senate to serve 3-year terms. 5 members are deaf or hard of hearing individuals, 2 interpreters licensed under Wis. Stat. § 440.032, and 1 member who is not deaf or hard of hearing and who has obtained, or represents an entity that has obtained, sign language interpreter services for another who is deaf or hard of hearing.

Member	Officer	Member Type	Term Expiration
Garay, Suzette	Chairperson	Deaf/Hard of Hearing Member	7/1/2014*
Mankowski, Joel E.	Vice Chairperson	Deaf/Hard of Hearing Member	7/1/2014*
Jaramillo, Carlos	Secretary	Interpreter Services Member	7/1/2014*
Jordan-Peters, Faye		Deaf/Hard of Hearing Member	7/1/2014*
Smart, Steve		Interpreter Member	7/1/2014*
Vacant		DSPS Secretary or Designee	
Vacant		Deaf/Hard of Hearing Member	
Vacant		Deaf/Hard of Hearing Member	
Vacant		Interpreter Member	

\*Council members whose terms have expired may continue to serve until their successor is appointed by the Governor.

## Announcements



November 29, 2017

Re: Testimony in support of AB-589

Dear Distinguished members of the committee,

I am here presenting my testimony as a President of Wisconsin Association of the Deaf, representing the deaf and hard of hearing population that depend on Sign Language Interpreter to communicate with non-signers like you all here today. Thanks to the ADA, every deaf individuals are entitled to effective communication with the "goal to ensure that communication with people with these disabilities is equally effective as communication with people without disabilities." (DOJ ADA)

I am here today because with the AB 589, a great legislation that would address the question of what makes communication effective? How do we determine which interpreter is effective? How do the hiring entities determine which setting is appropriate for the interpreter to work in and for service provider to understand what type of interpreter are needed to ensure communication is effective?

The society has changed slowly in making it more inclusive of deaf individuals to be able to be a tax paying contributing member of our community. The utilization of interpreter has become more complex hence the need for this bill to address the complicated issues that our community is experiencing which includes lack of clarity in what effective communication means. For instance, we are seeing unqualified interpreters interpreting in inappropriate setting, and unlicensed interpreters interpreting in violation of the law without any consequences as a few examples.

By having tiered system that restricts setting an interpreter can work addresses the consideration that is mentioned in the report by DOJ as quoted "the key to deciding what aid or service is needed to communicate effectively is to consider the nature, length, complexity and context of the communication". How one interpret the nature, length, complexity and context differs from one person to others so this bill addresses this concern by standardizing it by tiering- inexperienced and unskilled into one tier and advanced and skilled as proven by passage of the national exam and obtaining certification in the other tier will ensure that the deaf customers will likely have appropriate interpreter assigned for his/her setting thereby having effective communication. Such an example of an consideration is dealing with victims of Domestic Violence- It encompasses medical, legal, and requires immediate intervention. It is our belief that having advanced interpreter handle the delicate task of interpreting for the victims to ensure the most successful outcome of the case. Imagine having an inexperienced, untrained interpreter handling the assignment? As you know with DV victims, it is critical to preserve details and evidence and if the interpreter made an error, it could mean the accuser can walk free on technicality.

Unlike any other profession, we as a customer do not always have an opportunity to choose who interprets for us as the burden lies with the hiring entities. This bill will protect us and the service provider as well. For



instance, when a deaf person visit a doctor, a doctor and the deaf person both should be confident that effective communication occurs. By having an advanced interpreter that are highly skilled in complicated medical terminology, as we both know the doctor loves to speak using a different jargon- a medical ones, it makes us confident that we are receiving medical care equivalent as any hearing person and it makes the doctor confident that he/she is receiving all information he/she needs to know in order to make appropriate medical decision for my well-being.

Another huge component of this bill is establishment of the SLIEB which addresses the enforcement and standardization of this profession. This is a consumer majority board which is critical component because it is difficult for an interpreter to hold another interpreter accountable for their action so in this circumstance by having majority consumer, it can ensure that the consumer have the ability to hold interpreters accountable for their action.

I am proud of this community driven effort and I hope that after listening to various supporters of this bill, that you will support this bill because it will ensure that the deaf individuals have access to qualified interpreter as defined in bill, and increase our confidence that we will receive effective communication to be a tax paying contributing member of the society.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Katy Schmidt". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Katy Schmidt,  
President, Wisconsin Association of the Deaf  
Oak Creek, WI

Stephanie Zito  
212A N 64TH ST  
Milwaukee, WI 53213

Assembly Committee on Jobs and Economy  
Attn: Representative Adam Neylon (Chair)

RE: AB 589 - Support of the Sign Language Interpreter Licensure Bill

Dear Honorable Chair and Committee Members,

My name is Stephanie Zito and I have been interpreting for over 7 years. I am certified through the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) and licensed by both the Department of Safety and Professional Services (DSPS) as well as the Department of Public Instruction (DPI). I've worked on local, state, and national initiatives within the field of sign language interpreting, and I also provide technical assistance through the National Deaf Center. I am here today representing the Interpreter Licensure Committee, which was established collaborative effort between the Wisconsin Association of the Deaf (WAD) and the Wisconsin Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (WisRID). The Interpreter Licensure Committee was tasked with drafting a new licensing law after receiving recommendations from our predecessor, the Sign Language Interpreter Taskforce (SLIT). Our work has consisted of collaborating with legislators, the LRB, and stakeholders to craft an updated licensure law to be reflective of current practice. I've included a brief synopsis of the law, overview of outreach efforts, and key terminology to help guide today's discussion.

The trigger that prompted this thorough review of our law was when our national certifying body, the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID), placed a moratorium on all certification exams. For Wisconsin, the moratorium impacted those needing to move from a time restricted license to a permanently renewable license. Certifications also put on moratorium include those needed to become certified through the Wisconsin Supreme Court Interpreter Program for legal interpreting. As you can imagine we were concerned about not only losing part of our workforce because the lack of access to testing, but also recognized the impact this would have on our clients. WAD and WisRID took immediate action by establishing the Sign Language Interpreter Taskforce to review and recommend updates to the law.

I want to highlight the top four recommendations given by the SLIT:

1. Establish a Sign Language Interpreter Examining Board
2. Update License Requirements to Include Alternate Certification/Testing Options

3. Open License Opportunities for Deaf Interpreters (Training and Certification)
4. Clarify the use of DSPP vs. DPI Licensed Interpreters

### **Enforcement**

According to the "Informational Paper 97" by the Wisconsin Legislative Fiscal Bureau (2015), licensed professions have been regulated by independent boards as early as the 1880s. However, in the mid-1960s Wisconsin went through a series of reorganizations and established the Department of Regulation and Licensing (DRL) to provide centralized administrative services to the independent examining boards and councils existing at the time. While each board would continue the independent regulation of its own profession, the Department would assume responsibility for the direct regulation of certain professions where no examining board existed. That is currently the structure of our license for interpreters where the Department of Safety and Professional Services (formerly DRL) is the governing body with an advisory council.

The role of the board is to develop the administrative rules, policies and procedures, as well as determine disciplinary actions involving credential holders in that profession. DSPP assumes that role where a profession does not have an existing board. However, advisory councils are often established to assist DSPP with developing rules but by nature they only maintain an "advisory" role to DSPP.

The SLIT members and Interpreter Licensure Committee members both were informed by DSPP that the statutes only give them authority to determine disciplinary actions involving valid credential holders. Anything outside of that scope is considered criminal action and is referred to the district attorneys who have no interest in prosecuting individuals for unlicensed practice. This bill will update our council to a full-fledged board and include authorization to enforce the licensure law against unauthorized practice. The proposal maintains a majority consumer board to avoid federal antitrust liability since the board will have injunctive authority (See *North Carolina State Board of Dental Examiners v. Federal Trade Commission*). This is to avoid any risk of perceived restraints on trade or market availability. The model for the key stakeholders identified in the board began with the current Sign Language Interpreter Council and then updated the designated positions to be more inclusive. I will let the community share their stories about unlicensed practice and the impact it has on them as consumers.

### **Alternate Certification/Testing Options**

The Office for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing presented an update to the 2016 taskforce about our state screening exam used for hearing interpreters to obtain a restricted license. ODHH's recommendation was to replace the current screening exam with the Board for Evaluation (BEI)

of Interpreter certification exams. Since the BEI had a tiered system of testing, the low tier exam (BEI Basic) could be used as an equivalent to the state screening for restricted licenses while the other two exams (BEI Advance and Master) could be accepted for the renewable license level as an alternative to certification. The problem with that is BEI and RID certification requirements vary including the test construct (what the test is evaluating) to the continuing education requirements. In order to level the playing field to ensure that no matter what certification one obtains, there would be consistency in education, training, and professional development for all licensees we updated the requirements to verify proof of these important factors.

### **Opportunities for Deaf Interpreters**

That segues nicely into the opportunities for Deaf Interpreters to gain and maintain licensure. You can read about the role of a Deaf Interpreter in the packet I provided in key terminology. Deaf interpreters currently do not have any certification opportunities since their national exam, the Certified Deaf Interpreter exam, is still on moratorium until further notice. All restricted license interpreters will lose their jobs if the law does not change because there is no opportunity for them obtain a permanent license. Additionally, the role of the Deaf Interpreter is very specialized and so niche in our field that formal training programs through higher education do not exist for Deaf Interpreters. The proposal creates a minimum standard of training and education that best fit the specialization of Deaf Interpreters while also opening job opportunities by removing the time restriction.

### **DSPS vs. DPI Licensed Interpreters**


The Department of Public Instruction (DPI) licenses educational interpreters working with deaf, hard of hearing, and deafblind children in K-12 schools. However, there are many grey-areas where clarification is needed on whether school districts need to hire a DSPS vs. DPI licensed interpreter. For example, the DPI license covers working with children in the classroom but is not clear on how to approach deaf parents, deaf employees of the school district, and other deaf adults who need access that is covered under different legal mandates compared with children. The proposed law establishes a MOU Committee incorporating of a variety of stakeholders to create guidelines for hiring entities to determine when a DSPS vs. DPI licensed interpreter is required.

### **Conclusion**

Seven years ago when the license initially passed, we could not have predicted the changes that transpired in the interpreting field causing barriers to entry and sustainability of our interpreting profession. By supporting this bill, you will lessen these barriers to employment while balancing

the needs of consumers to have high quality service providers. The proposed updates will be more reflective to current practice and responsive to future changes through the establishment of the Sign Language Interpreter Examining Board. Thank you for your time and I would be happy to answer any questions from the committee about our work drafting AB 589. I can be reached at [stephanie.t.zito@gmail.com](mailto:stephanie.t.zito@gmail.com) or via phone at (262)818-0881.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Stephanie Zito". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name and title.

Stephanie Zito, M.S., NIC  
DSPS and DPI Licensed Interpreter  
Interpreter Licensure Committee Chair  
[stephanie.t.zito@gmail.com](mailto:stephanie.t.zito@gmail.com)  
262.818.0881

# Licensing of Sign Language Interpreters in Wisconsin: An Introduction



*A sign language interpreter is a professional hired to facilitate communication between Deaf/Hard of Hearing/Deafblind (D/HH/DB) individuals and individuals who do not know sign language.*

## Why do we need AB 589 / SB 465?

Since the passing of the initial license (Wisconsin §440.032) in 2010, many changes occurred in the interpreting field along with general feedback from both consumers and professionals that became the impetus for reviewing/updating licensure standards in Wisconsin. The initial license was a great milestone for Wisconsin, however, there were serious gaps in the law that could have prevented unlicensed, unauthorized practice of interpreting as well as a current shortage in available licensed interpreters. AB 589 / SB 465 seek to update and improve licensing of sign language interpreters.

## What will be the impact of the bill on the quality of interpretation?

The American's with Disabilities Act (ADA) defines a "qualified" interpreter as "someone who is able to interpret effectively, accurately, and impartially, both receptively (i.e., understanding what the person with the disability is saying) and expressively (i.e., having the skill needed to convey information back to that person) using any necessary specialized vocabulary." Licensure is the key to protecting consumers from fraud or substandard skills in very critical situations such as education, employment, medical, and legal settings. Often hiring entities are not familiar enough with sign language and can easily hire someone who does not possess the skills to interpret effectively. With licensure, we establish the minimum standard to which any individual receiving compensation for interpreting shall be verified to have fluency in interpretation skills. The current law is weak with enforcement and proposed updates establish a Sign Language Interpreter Examining Board to oversee both licensed and unauthorized practice.

*For more information please visit [www.wisrid.org/licensure](http://www.wisrid.org/licensure)*

## Key Players in Proposed Licensure Bill

### Department of Safety and Professional Services

Provides Administrative Support to the new Sign Language Interpreter Examining Board (SLIEB)

### Inter-Agency Collaborators

WI Supreme Court Interpreter Program (Legal Interpreter Roster)

ODHH (Exam Administrator)

DPI (MOU Committee)

### Sign Language Interpreter Examining Board

Consists of licensed professionals, Deaf/Hard of Hearing/Deafblind clients as well as non-deaf clients who primarily hire interpreters. Oversees license.

### Community Organizations

WAD and WisRID provide consultation to the state on selecting qualified board members to serve on SLIEB.

## Key Terminology

<b>Advanced</b>	New proposed license category to identify interpreters with advanced skills for high risk settings.
<b>(BEI) Board for Evaluation of Interpreters</b>	A certification system for sign language interpreters currently accepted by nearly 20 state including Illinois and Michigan. BEI requires interpreters to take a Test of English Proficiency and offers three interpretation exams: Basic, Advanced, and Master
<b>CEUs</b>	Continuing Education Units, hours of professional development
<b>D/HH/DB</b>	Deaf/Hard of Hearing/Deafblind, various identities of clients who may utilize sign language interpreting services for communication access.
<b>“Deaf” Interpreter</b>	An interpreter who may be native users of American Sign Language who are often hired to work with a hearing interpreter when D/HH/DB clients have unique language needs (i.e. dysfluent language, no foundational language, foreign sign language) or to interpret in platform settings for larger D/HH/DB audiences (e.g., live emergency television broadcasts, community forums, etc.).
<b>(DPI) Department of Public Instruction</b>	State agency that licenses educational interpreters working in K-12 schools with D/HH/DB children
<b>(DSPS) Department of Safety and Professional Services</b>	State agency that licenses interpreters for working in settings outside the scope of the K-12 license (see exemptions).
<b>DSPS 150 Renewable License</b>	Current license category that can be renewed every two years indefinitely.
<b>DSPS 151 Restricted License</b>	Current license category that can only be renewed twice.
<b>“Hearing” Interpreter</b>	An interpreter who interprets to and from spoken English and American Sign Language
<b>Intermediate</b>	New proposed license category to identify novice interpreters.
<b>(MOU) Memorandum of Understanding</b>	For purposes of the proposed law, the MOU will be between DPI and DSPS/SLIEB to clarify when and where DPI vs. DSPS licensed interpreters can be hired for grey-area, school-related situations.
<b>(ODHH) Office for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing</b>	State agency that provides information and referrals regarding D/HH/DB individuals. Currently administers state screening exam for interpreters.
<b>(RID) Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf</b>	National organization for sign language interpreters that also runs a certification program for interpreters. The RID NIC requires interpreters to take a written knowledge exam as well as a performance exam with an ethical interview component.
<b>(SLIC) Sign Language Interpreter Council</b>	Current advisory council to DSPS on interpreter licensure.
<b>(SLIEB) Sign Language Interpreter Examining Board</b>	Proposed board to replace the SLIC and assumes the role as governing body of the DSPS license for interpreters.
<b>(WAD) Wisconsin Association of the Deaf</b>	Nonprofit organization that supports D/HH/DB individuals through advocating for civil, human, cultural and linguistic rights of deaf individuals in Wisconsin.
<b>(WisRID) Wisconsin Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf</b>	State chapter to the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, a nonprofit professional organization for sign language interpreters.

# Sign Language Interpreter Licensure Bill: General Changes and Rationale

Change	Rationale
Renewal Restriction Removal	DSPS licenses have a 2-year renewal period. The proposed bill allows interpreters to work continually with no limitation on renewals. This is different from the current licensing system where the DSPS 150 (Restricted License) has a 2-renewal limit and has caused displacement of qualified interpreters from work due to its restrictive nature.
Setting Restrictions	The DSPS license is intended for generalist practitioners who work in a variety of settings. Current law allows interpreters without national certification or novice skills levels to interpret in critical situations such as legal, mental health, and medical settings. The proposed legislation protects consumers and businesses, requiring an advance standard of skill before entering a high-risk environment, avoiding potential for miscommunication and legal recourse.
Enforcement (Council to Board)	Enforcement has been identified as a major area of weakness in the current license due to the limited penalties and powers to pursue corrective action against unauthorized practice or unethical behavior. Many D/HH/DB individuals who have filed grievances felt their concerns were inadequately addressed or remedied, especially unlicensed interpreters in medical scenarios. Many other D/HH/DB individuals have not attempted to file a complaint due to many factors for similar issues with interpreters. The Sign Language Interpreter Examining Board will have the governing authority to seek corrective action for those who do not follow the licensure law and will encourage consumers to file complaints to further prevent unauthorized practice.
Competing Certifications	Most interpreters can be certified under two different systems (RID and BEI) to achieve a license. Each system varies in educational and training requirements, evaluation of ancillary skills (knowledge/ethics), credential levels, & certification maintenance. Proposed changes a minimum standard of expectation for any interpreter regardless of which certification was achieved while protecting the public from substandard levels of knowledge and skill.
Replacing the Wisconsin Interpreting and Transliterating Assessment (WITA)	ODHH, under DHS, recognizes that the WITA assessment is outdated and needs to be replaced. However, it cannot formally remove the program because it is currently written the licensure law. The proposed changes will no longer accept the outdated screening and requires DHS to provide the BEI certification exams instead. ODHH has been actively pursuing the contract to bring the BEI to Wisconsin since 2015.
CEU Requirements	Current restricted license holders do not have to maintain continuing education because they are not required to be certified. In order for all licensees to be accountable to a standard of continuing education, license renewals will ask for proof of CEU hours. This is further justified as certification programs (BEI and RID) vary in their CEU requirements and one license category (Intermediate-Deaf) does not have a certification required to obtain a permanent license.
MOU Committee	A committee of key stakeholders is established and charged with creating a MOU Guideline for when and where hiring entities should utilize a DPI vs. DSPS licensed interpreter in grey-area situations. The committee shall meet before each license renewal cycle to review the MOU agreement and make any recommendations for updates.
Video Remote Interpreting	Interpreting can be conducted virtually through video conference technology where the clients are in the same room but the interpreter is available via video. Due to some states who lack minimum standards for sign language interpreters, the proposed bill includes a provision to require video remote interpreters to be licensed whether providing services to Wisconsin clients or working in Wisconsin and providing services to clients outside of the state.



# What has been the process for obtaining community feedback and what stakeholders have been involved?

## 2016 Sign Language Interpreter Task Force (SLITF)

### Task force members:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Chair: Pam Conine</b> (Certified, Instructor, WAD/WisRID Liaison)                            | <b>Angie Zenisek</b> (Pre Certified)   |
| <b>Jamie Garrison</b> (Certified, Qualified Mental Health Interpreter)                          | <b>Tom Harbison</b> (Deaf consumer)  |
| <b>Kate Block</b> (Certified, Certified Legal Interpreter, Qualified Mental Health Interpreter) | <b>Terri Matenaer</b> (Deaf consumer, WAD Board Member)                        |
| <b>Amy Fryman</b> (Certified, Certified Legal Interpreter, Hiring Manager for Agency)           | <b>Cookie Roang</b> (Deaf consumer, parent of deaf children)                   |
| <b>Lori Connors</b> (Certified, Hiring Manager)   | <b>Ashley Hofkamp</b> (Deaf Interpreter)                                       |
|   | <b>Rep. Jonathan Brostoff</b> (Stakeholder)                                    |
|   | <b>Rhonda Taylor Parris</b> (Hospital Administrator for Interpreting Services) |

### Online Surveys:

- October 2015: Survey to the community about gaps, issues, and other loopholes currently found in the law.
- November 2016: Surveyed the community on the recommendations developed by the SLIT and whether to pursue drafting an updated license.

### Meetings/Open Forums:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• January 6th: SLIT member meeting (minutes posted publicly)</li> <li>• February 3rd: SLIT member meeting (minutes posted publicly)</li> <li>• March 2nd: SLIT member meeting (minutes posted publicly)</li> <li>• April 6th: Live streamed and recorded public forum</li> <li>• May 4th: Live streamed and recorded public forum (Guest presenters: ODHH Representatives Dan Milikin and Amber Mullet)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• June 1st: Live streamed and recorded public forum (Guest presenter: ODHH Representative Dan Milikin)</li> <li>• July/August -- Break for Subcommittee work (various meetings)</li> <li>• September 7th: Live streamed and recorded public forum.</li> <li>• October 2nd: Live streamed and recorded public forum.</li> <li>• October 21<sup>st</sup>: Presented at the WisRID Annual Conference in Madison, WI on proposed recommendations and asked for community feedback.</li> </ul> |
|---|--|

## 2017 Interpreter Licensure Committee

### Met with stakeholders for further feedback:

- |  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DSPS</li> <li>• DPI and DHH Council Members</li> <li>• ODHH</li> <li>• Wisconsin Supreme Court Interpreter Program</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Specialist Interpreters (Mental Health and Legal)</li> <li>• Deaf Interpreter Workgroup (consisted of certified and pre-certified individuals)</li> <li>• Deaf Interpreter Advisor to RID</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Joint Legislative Committee (WisRID and WAD)</li> <li>• Interpreting Agency Owners from Northern and Southern Wisconsin</li> <li>• K-12 Interpreters licensed by DPI</li> </ul> |
|--|---|--|

### Online Surveys:

- March 2017: Surveyed community on proposed draft and solicited feedback for improvements.

### Open Forums:

- July 26<sup>th</sup>: Live streamed and recorded informational session about proposed draft bill Pewaukee, WI.
- October 1<sup>st</sup>: Live streamed and recorded informational session about proposed draft bill in Appleton, WI at the WisRID Annual Conference.

**Timeline of Events**

<b>April 2010</b>	Wisconsin Act 360 passed and was signed by Governor Jim Doyle on May 13 <sup>th</sup> , 2010.						
<b>Summer 2010</b>	The RID Annual Report for FY 2010 shows the pass rate of the NIC interview/performance exam at 77%. The NIC had a three-level system of NIC Master, NIC Advance, and NIC.						
<b>September 2010</b>	Guy Motley, an RID employee, is caught performing illegal financial activity relating to RID certification. After an investigation it was found that the employee falsified scores and embezzled money.						
<b>July 2011</b>	At RID National Conference in Atlanta, GA: RID announces "Enhanced NIC" exam being developed. Enhanced NIC is pass/fail and NIC levels to be discontinued.						
<b>June 2015</b>	RID releases the 2014 annual report. The Interview/Performance portion of the "New Enhanced NIC" has a pass rate of 26%.						
<b>August 2015</b>	RID Board of Directors announces that all certification and testing would be placed on a moratorium.						
<b>January 2016</b>	The Wisconsin Sign Language Interpreter Taskforce (SLIT) begin meeting to review the Wisconsin licensure law for weaknesses and areas of improvement to address the changes in the interpreting field.						
<b>Summer 2016</b>	RID releases the 2015 annual report. The "New Enhanced NIC" has the lowest pass rate in the history of the organization at <b>19%</b> .						
<b>September 2016</b>	<p>Department of Safety and Professional Services release announcement stating that the Board for Evaluation of Interpreter exams will be accepted as licensure requirements:</p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;"> <b>BEI- Basic</b>                      -must take and pass the TEP first                 </td> <td style="padding: 5px; text-align: center;">                     Restricted License (151)                 </td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;"> <b>BEI- Advance</b>                      -must take and pass both the TEP and Basic to sit for the BEI-Advance test                 </td> <td style="padding: 5px; text-align: center;">                     Renewable License (150)                 </td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;"> <b>BEI- Master</b>                      -must have at least a BEI-Advance or NIC to sit for the test)                 </td> <td></td> </tr> </table>	<b>BEI- Basic</b> -must take and pass the TEP first	Restricted License (151)	<b>BEI- Advance</b> -must take and pass both the TEP and Basic to sit for the BEI-Advance test	Renewable License (150)	<b>BEI- Master</b> -must have at least a BEI-Advance or NIC to sit for the test)	
<b>BEI- Basic</b> -must take and pass the TEP first	Restricted License (151)						
<b>BEI- Advance</b> -must take and pass both the TEP and Basic to sit for the BEI-Advance test	Renewable License (150)						
<b>BEI- Master</b> -must have at least a BEI-Advance or NIC to sit for the test)							
<b>November 2016</b>	<p>RID testing centers through newly established CASLI, Inc. begin scheduling NIC performance exams again.</p> <p>SLIT provides recommendations on drafting a new interpreter licensure law.</p>						

<b>January 2017</b>	The Interpreter Licensure Committee begins working with LRB to draft a new interpreter license law (LRB 2200)
<b>September 1st 2017</b>	Renewal date for the Sign Language Interpreter Licenses (both restricted and renewable). We have a list of 27 individuals were not able to renew because they did not have any renewal periods available to maintain the restricted license and are waiting to take a test or are waiting on results from a test.

**Review of Current Certification for Interpreters:**

**Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf:** Hosts the RID-NIC certification program. The Center for Assessment of Sign Language Interpreters (CASLI, Inc.) administer the RID-NIC performance examination.

What is needed for the **renewable** license?

Hearing Interpreters	Deaf Interpreters
RID National Interpreter Certification (NIC)	RID Certified Deaf Interpreter (CDI) certification*

\*The Certified Deaf Interpreter certification exam (required for Deaf Interpreters to move from restricted to renewable under method two) has been in moratorium since January 1st, 2016. RID plans to keep the CDI in moratorium until a new test can be developed.

**NIC Performance Test Pass Rates**

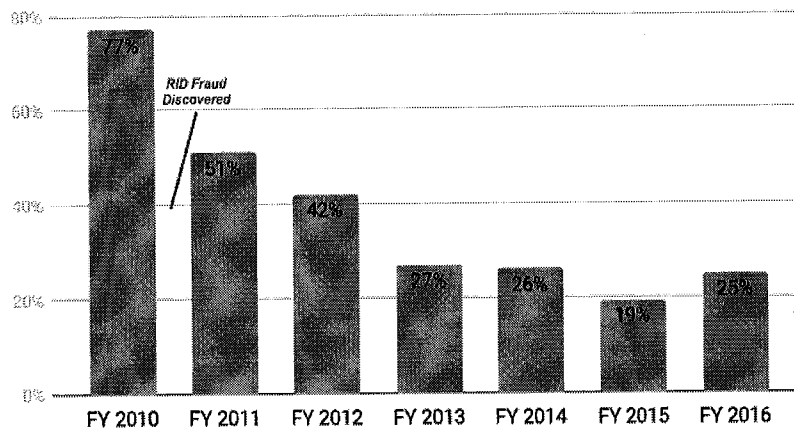


Table: Information taken from the RID Annual Reports 2010-2016

**Board for Evaluation of Interpreters (BEI):** Hosts the TEP, BEI-Basic, BEI-Advance, and BEI-Master exams and certification program.

What is required for the renewable license?

<b>Hearing Interpreters</b>	<b>Deaf Interpreters</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● First, take and Pass the Test of English Proficiency (TEP) test</li><li>● Second, take and Pass the BEI - Basic certification performance test</li><li>● Third, take and Pass the BEI- Advance certification performance test</li></ul> <p>You must follow these steps in order to obtain the BEI-Advance.</p>	<p><i>BEI does not currently offer a certification exam for Deaf Interpreters. Deaf interpreters are still left without the ability to move from restricted to renewable license.</i></p>

## LRB 4250: Proposed Changes to Sign Language Interpreter Licensure

### Summary

LRB-4250 would replace the Wisconsin license for sign language interpreters that was passed in 2010: Wisconsin §440.032. Current licensure no longer reflects the evolution of a growing profession and proposed changes which updates and models best practices for sign language interpreters.

*Licensure is key to protecting consumers from fraud or substandard skills in very critical situations such as education, employment, medical, and legal settings.*

Since the passing of the law, the field of sign language interpretation has increased its expectations of practitioners to obtain knowledge and techniques acquired through formal study. This includes a set of language processing skills, ethical decision making skills, and breadth/depth of technical knowledge. Using national standards for interpreters, the proposed licensure model appropriately places interpreters in categories based on education, training, and skill level.

### Proposed Licensure Tiers

For more information on the differences between hearing and deaf interpreters please see *Sign Language Interpreters: An Introduction* ([www.nationaldeafcenter.org/introsli](http://www.nationaldeafcenter.org/introsli))

<h3>Intermediate Hearing</h3> <p><b>Requires</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Minimum of a bachelor's degree</li><li>• Successful completion of an interpreter training program completion</li><li>• BEI Basic certification or equivalent</li></ul> <p>Alternative options available for those who may only have an associate's degree in sign language interpretation or are BEI Basic certified prior to the enactment of the law.</p> <p><b>Setting Restriction</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Cannot interpret in legal or mental health settings</li><li>• Cannot interpret in medical settings unless team interpreting with an advanced-licensed interpreter (deaf or hearing)</li></ul>	
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<h3>Intermediate Deaf</h3> <p><b>Requires</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Requires a minimum of a high school diploma</li><li>• Intense, comprehensive training as a Deaf Interpreter based on specialized deaf interpreting skills, ASL language development, and observation with Deaf interpreters.</li></ul> <p><b>Setting Restriction</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Cannot interpret in legal unless listed on the Wisconsin Supreme Court Interpreter Roster</li></ul>	
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<b>Changes</b>	<b>Rationale</b>
License Cycle and Renewal	The proposed bill allows interpreters to work indefinitely under permanent licenses, provided they maintain licensure and certification requirements where applicable.
Setting Restrictions	The DSPS license is intended for generalist practitioners who work in a variety of settings. Current law allows interpreters without national certification to interpret in critical situations such as legal, mental health and medical settings. The proposed legislation protects consumers and businesses, requiring an advance standard of skill before entering a high-risk environment, avoiding potential for miscommunication and legal recourse.
Enforcement	Enforcement has been identified as a weakness in the current license due to limited penalties for infractions. Many Deaf community members have not attempted to file a complaint, and for those who have, many grievances have been inadequately addressed or remedied. The addition of the Sign Language Interpreting Examining Board will have the governance authority to seek punitive measures and will encourage consumers to file complaints.
Title Protection	Under the proposed law, no individual may use any title relating to sign language interpreters unless the individual is licensed under DSPS, falls under the educational interpreter exemption, or is interpreting in specific religious settings. In order to protect consumers from fraud, unlicensed individuals caught providing sign language interpreting services for compensation will incur severe penalties.
Competing Certifications	There are two competing national certification programs (RID and BEI) that vary in requirements, evaluation, and credential levels. Proposed changes ensure Wisconsin licensed interpreters have equivalent qualifications regardless of certification. In order to protect the interest of the public from substandard levels of knowledge and skill, the proposed license structure establishes a clear pathway for both deaf and hearing interpreters.
Replacing the Wisconsin Interpreting and Transliterating Assessment (WITA)	The Office for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing under the Department of Health Services recognizes that the WITA assessment is outdated and needs to be replaced. It cannot formally remove the program because it is currently written into the license requirements. The proposed changes require DHS to provide updated testing for licensure; ODHHS has been in the process of obtaining the BEI certification exams since late 2015.
CEU Requirements	Certification programs vary in their CEU cycle requirements. Additionally, one license category (Intermediate-Deaf) does not require a certification to obtain a license but will expect interpreters in that category to maintain continuing education standards equivalent to their peers.
MOU Committee	A committee of stakeholders is established and charged with creating a MOU guideline for when and where a DPI license and DSPS license is a requirement. Committee shall meet before each license renewal cycle to either continue the MOU agreement or recommend updates.
Video Remote Interpreting	Because some states do not have minimum standards for sign language interpreters to work, the proposed bill includes a provision to require video remote interpreters to be licensed whether providing services to clients within the state or working in the state as a remote interpreter.

Save info:

Temporary Exemptions	Flexible time periods for temporary exemptions can be requested to the proposed Sign Language Interpreter Examining Board.
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Good morning Representative Neylon and members of this committee. My name is Jana Mauldin and I am speaking today neither for nor against Assembly Bill 589 and Senate Bill 465 as written and to suggest improvements for consideration.

I understand there is concern for citizens of Wisconsin to have the right to work, and remain employed without facing too many burdens or obstacles. Interpreters currently entering the field are not struggling to find work. At first glance, nationally certified interpreters may look guilty of being a self-serving bunch. I am nationally certified and advocate for interpreters to obtain national certification, but the reason is not to keep interpreters out of my profession. As my colleagues know, I mentor and provide internship opportunities to newer interpreters in an effort to increase the pool of highly qualified professionals. You see the problem we are here to discuss today is not the quantity of work available, but rather than quality of services being provided.

I am affected by interpreting services in my personal life, because my husband and father to my three children is Deaf. Every parent/teacher conference, IEP meeting, school play, doctor's appointment and so-on that involves my children, has another human being in the room relaying all of the information to my husband so that he can be an equal partner on this parenthood journey we're on. His opinions, thoughts and beliefs are carried through the voice of another human being. So naturally, I evaluate every sign that is chosen, or every word that is uttered by the interpreters to ensure accuracy. But most consumers of interpreting services don't have that luxury. Most doctors and government officials have no way of knowing whether or not their words were interpreted accurately, and most Deaf people are forced to trust their thoughts were conveyed as intended. The only way we can ensure that an interpreter is able to effectively do the work is if they have proven their capabilities by passing a performance exam.

Evaluating interpreting skills is no easy task. In fact, our own profession has struggled with finding the right tool to evaluate the work we do. The proposal suggests a different examination be used to qualify interpreters to work, and I agree with this direction. The bill is also written well to allow for the inevitable change of exams in our future. The proposed Sign Language Interpreters Examining Board also offers consumers an avenue to express their concerns or file complaints that will be acted upon.

The reason I cannot fully support this bill is that it does not hold interpreters accountable to advance professionally. You may be wondering why we need licensure at all with a market that has the ability to weed out incompetent service providers. However, the Deaf citizens of Wisconsin typically do not get the opportunity to choose their interpreters, provide feedback about their experiences, or pay for these services, which therefore means these consumers have no control of the market.



A recent article published in the Cap Times states that “responsible employers... can provide newbies and cross their fingers that rookies don’t screw up.” I agree that this is a problem, and that screw-ups happen at the expense of a Deaf person’s life. However, the proposed bill states that “rookie interpreters” will be limited to specific environments that are not medical, legal, or mental health and that this provides adequate protection to the Deaf community. My concern is that these “screw-ups” do not only cause damage in the limited settings laid out in the proposal. Consider the following situations: a college student’s access to university classes they have paid for, a professional’s chance of obtaining employment, a family member’s funeral, applying for a loan or mortgage, or serving as a board member to participate in local government. Should an interpreter who has minimal qualifications be allowed in all of these environments and have the opportunity to “screw up?”

The improvement for consideration that I suggest is as follows: The Sign Language Interpreter- Intermediate Hearing level license cannot be indefinite. Recent graduates in our field need a permit to work in a variety of environments with support from experienced interpreters, but it is crucial for the Deaf community that this be a limited amount of time with national certification as the expectation.

Thank you for your time.

Appreciatively,

Jana R Mauldin, NIC

[janainterprets@gmail.com](mailto:janainterprets@gmail.com)  
608-219-6598

November 27, 2017

RE: AB 589/SB 465 - Support the Sign Language Interpreter Licensure Bill

Dear Honorable Wisconsin Legislative Committee

My name is Katie Voss and I am a resident in Germantown, WI. I want you to support AB 589/SB 465, which is the Sign Language Interpreter Licensure Bill. This bill is important to deaf, hard of hearing, deafblind, sign language interpreters and various stakeholders in our state. The bill will provide much needed protections for consumers by including better enforcement and oversight of sign language interpreters. In addition, it includes reasonable requirements for service providers that will ensure employment opportunities while maintaining high quality standards for consumers.

After the initial law passed in 2010, I felt confident as a consumer that no matter where I go, I will have a licensed interpreter. However, several years ago I learned first hand that the law was not able to protect me from unqualified, unlicensed individuals from providing services. My story begins at a doctor's office several years ago. Often deaf people don't know who is scheduled to interpret for their appointments so we have to trust that the doctor's office hires a licensed individual. During my experience, I was shocked when I learned that the interpreter did not have any Wisconsin license. When I addressed her about it, she claimed that she didn't need one.. I needed to see the doctor that day and so I continued with the appointment. However, I soon realized how much information she was omitting; the doctor would speak for a very long time and she only signed a sentence or two. This was not normal. I felt that my health information was not being provided enough for me to understand what is going on. I thought to myself how can the interpreter only can give me few sentence what the doctor says. I didn't know how to express my concern to the doctor because I felt as though I couldn't trust the interpreter to tell the doctor exactly what I said, given that she was not interpreting exactly what the doctor said. I felt my health was the jeopardy and I began to think of other deaf people who had her as their interpreter. An unlicensed or inexperienced interpreter during medical appointment puts me in grave danger as a deaf person and we can't afford this kind of life we face daily. After this happened to me, I filed a complaint to DSPS (Department Safety Professional Services). When I didn't hear anything from them for months, I called to follow up. They said they had received the complaint, but they can't do anything because nothing was mentioned in the current law (State Statutes 440.03). I asked them what my options were and was told to contact the District Attorney (DA) in Waukesha which is where the incident happened. The DA's office advised that they couldn't do much as they felt the situation had minimal impact not worth to fight for. So that leaves me feeling twisted in my stomach knowing that many unqualified, unlicensed interpreters can go out and get paid without consequence. That is very dangerous for all of us.

Another issue with the current law, they allow recent graduates from Interpreter Training Programs (ITP) to work in any setting which can be dangerous not only to deaf people but the hearing consumers as well. Recent graduates are not experienced enough to do the work in legal, medical, mental health and domestic violence or any other critical, high risk situations. With this proposal bill, we have two-tiered system where the interpreters work in settings that best match their skill and knowledge level. .

Due to changes in certification on a national level, we need to ensure that interpreters have additional options to verify their qualifications to work in this profession. The proposed bill includes alternatives for certification, which is a minimum requirement that provides protections to the consumers. AB 589/SB 465 will eliminate the restricted six-year terminal license and replace it with an indefinite license as long as certification and continuing education requirements are met. This will allow professionals to continue working and provide a larger pool of service providers to meet the many needs of consumers. AB 589/SB 465 includes a MOU between the Department of Safety and Professional Services and the Department of Public Instruction to bring clarity and agreement regarding the scope of work in K-12 settings and community settings. This bill proposes to establish an examining board that is comprised with a majority of consumers. Under the current law, the enforcement mechanisms are weak and have minimal impact on the oversight of ethical practices. The proposed board will be authorized to monitor and enforce the law and ensure safeguards are in place so

that an already marginalized community is not further taken advantage of and suffer at the hands of unqualified and unethical practitioners.

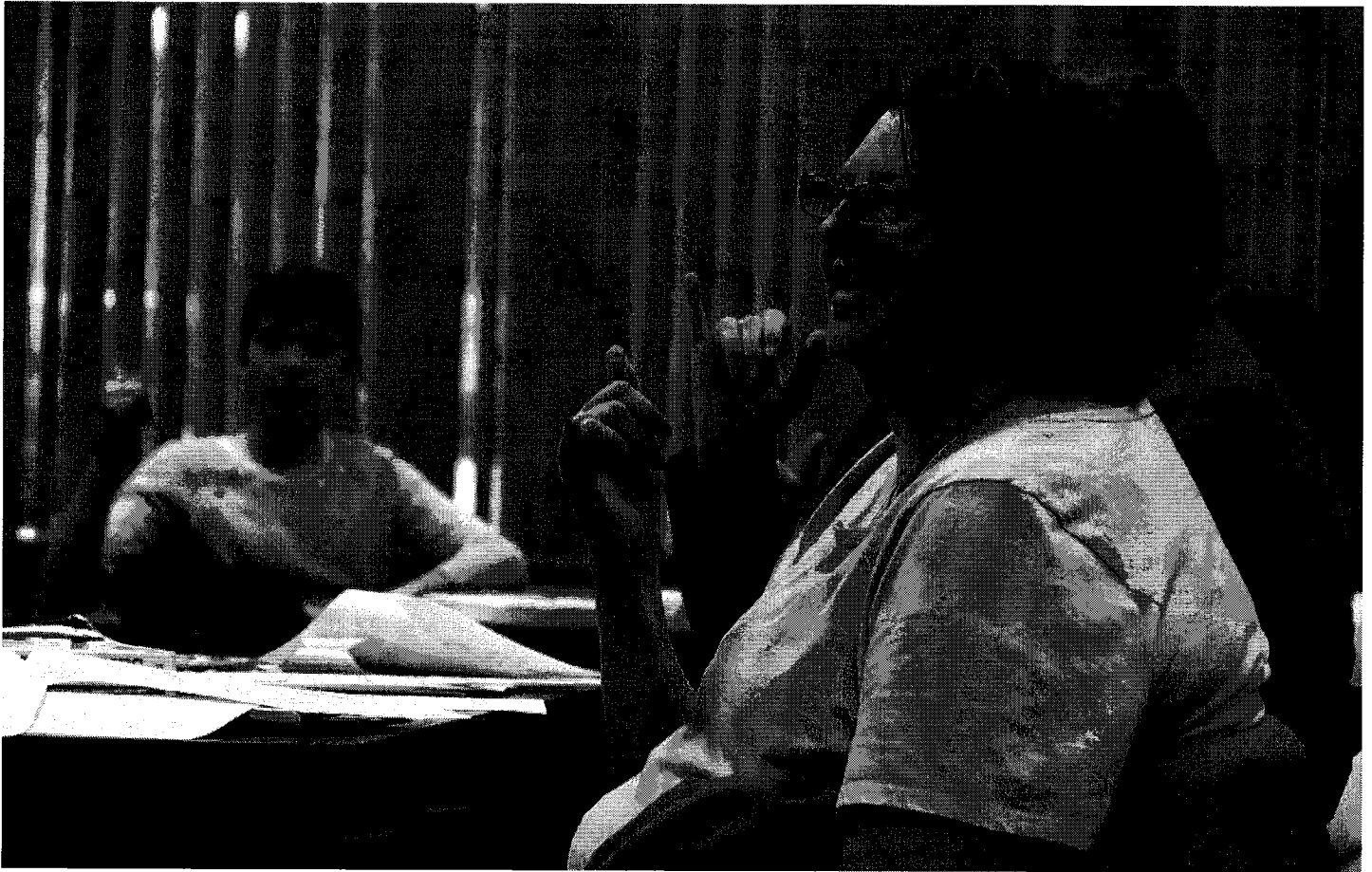
It is my hope the committee will seriously consider the points presented today and vote to support AB 589/SB 465, the Sign Language Interpreter Licensure Bill. The bill will lessen some of the restrictions and barriers to employment while balancing the needs of consumers to have high quality service providers. Thank you for your time

Sincerely,

Katie Voss  
W164N11139 Kings Way  
Germantown, WI 53022  
[katievoss@gmail.com](mailto:katievoss@gmail.com)  
registered voter and taxpayer

# Rep. Jonathan Brostoff and Andrea Metzger: Bill would improve access and accountability for sign language interpreting in Wisconsin

By Rep. Jonathan Brostoff and Andrea Metzger | state rep and sign language interpreter, respectively



Brenda Olson, foreground, and Katell Riddlestine, background, practice a gesture during an American Sign Language class Nov. 23, 2016, at the Reedsburg Public Library.  
Heather Stanek/Times-Press

Imagine traveling in a foreign country and suddenly needing emergency medical attention. An interpreter is called to the hospital, but he or she isn't fluent in English. Suddenly, your access to critical medical care is 100 percent dependent on somebody who doesn't speak your language.

Unsettling, right? Well, this is the very real scenario faced by deaf people in Wisconsin today. Current law and licensure regulations have created a perfect storm: a serious shortage of experienced interpreters at the same time that rookie interpreters just out of school are allowed to interpret complex medical procedures, psychiatric appointments and legal court proceedings.

Two forces created this mess. The accepted practice has been that after six years of initial licensing, interpreters must pass a national certification exam created by the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) to attain permanent, renewable licenses.

However, that exam has erroneously transformed so that now the national pass rate has plummeted from 77 percent to 19 percent. As a result, 28 highly skilled Wisconsin interpreters lost their licenses on Sept. 1. (A RID certification department employee committed internal fraud and embezzlement, which sparked the organization to replace its certification exam.)

At the same time, current Wisconsin law allows newly minted interpreters to work in any situation, including medical and legal procedures where a deaf person's life or livelihood could be at stake.

Responsible employers who provide interpreting services are caught between a rock and a hard place: They either must turn down business because their experienced professionals aren't currently licensed, or they can provide newbies just out of school and cross their fingers that the rookies don't screw up. A local company I'm familiar with had to turn down 73 jobs since Sept. 1 because of this flawed system.

Luckily there is a solution to this mess. Legislation currently before the Wisconsin Assembly and Senate (AB 589 / SB 465) would clarify alternatives to the hyper-restrictive RID exam. It would sanction an alternative test, create a tier system of intermediate and advanced interpreters, and grandfather in professionals who have already passed the RID test.

Further, the bill protects consumers in critical situations by applying stiff fines and penalties for those who pose as a sign language interpreter.

Overall, this new bill will raise the quality and standard of services by appropriately placing interpreters in environments best suited to his or her skill level.

This in turn will restore the confidence of businesses and government agencies that require interpreters that there is a ready supply of skilled professionals they can match with their varied needs.

There will be a hearing on the bill at 10 a.m. Thursday, Nov. 30, in the Capitol, Room 411 South. Please push your legislators to support competency, transparency, and efficiency by asking them to support AB 589 / SB 465.

*Wisconsin state Rep. Jonathan Brostoff represents Wisconsin's 19th Assembly District, which includes Milwaukee's east side, downtown, Riverwest, and Bay View. Andrea Metzger is a sign language interpreter located in Milwaukee.*

*Share your opinion on this topic by sending a letter to the editor to [tctvoice@madison.com](mailto:tctvoice@madison.com). Include your full name, hometown and phone number. Your name and town will be published. The phone number is for verification purposes only. Please keep your letter to 250 words or less.*

[http://host.madison.com/ct/opinion/column/rep-jonathan-brostoff-and-andrea-metzger-bill-would-improve-access/article\\_264072ca-997e-509d-b802-116486e1f071.html](http://host.madison.com/ct/opinion/column/rep-jonathan-brostoff-and-andrea-metzger-bill-would-improve-access/article_264072ca-997e-509d-b802-116486e1f071.html)

To: Representative Adam Neylon, Chair, Assembly Committee on Jobs and the Economy  
Members of the Assembly Committee on Jobs and the Economy

From: Disability Rights Wisconsin

Date: November 30, 2017

Re: Testimony in Support of 2017 AB 589

Thank you Representative Neylon and members of the Committee for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of Assembly Bill 589 relating to regulation of sign language interpretation services. Disability Rights Wisconsin (DRW) is the designated Protection and Advocacy system for Wisconsinites with disabilities. DRW is charged with protecting and enforcing the legal rights of individuals with disabilities, investigating systemic abuse and neglect, and ensuring access to supports and services, so that all Wisconsinites can learn, work, and live full lives in our communities free of abuse, neglect, and discrimination.

We are pleased to support AB 589 because it has the potential to benefit Wisconsinites who are deaf and hard of hearing, by supporting access to qualified interpreters and providing more effective oversight. The proposal is based on significant community input coordinated by a Sign Language Interpreter Task Force convened by Wisconsin Association for the Deaf (WAD) and the Wisconsin Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (WisRID). The Task Force used multiple approaches to solicit stakeholder input, including online surveys, community meetings, and meetings with partners. This is a very complex and specialized issue, and we commend the significant effort that has been put forth to be responsive to community needs.

Some of the positive aspects of the bill include the following:

- ASL interpreters are required to perform very specialized and highly skilled work in their role of accurately conveying information that may be very sensitive and complex. This includes legal, mental health, and medical settings. The proposed legislation will protect consumers by requiring an advanced level of skill for those who work in these specialized settings to ensure they have the training needed to accurately convey very sensitive and technical information.
- The proposed Sign Language Interpreters Examining Board will provide a framework for more effective enforcement and follow-up on complaints, as well as protection for consumers from fraud, by more effectively addressing concerns about unlicensed practice of interpreting in Wisconsin. The Examining Board will benefit from participation by consumers and professionals. Having a robust consumer board will provide strong consumer protection, greater independence, and a reduction in concerns on conflicts of interest.
- DRW has heard significant concerns from deaf individuals about access to mental health services and the challenges that can result when a practitioner uses unlicensed interpreters or those without

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disabilityrightswi.org

800 928-8778 consumers & family

specialized training. The new requirement for advanced training for those who interpret in a mental health setting has the potential to improve the quality of communication and support better outcomes for the consumer.

Thank you for your consideration of our comments supporting this proposal. In recent years DRW has heard from many deaf Wisconsinites about the difficulties they experience in accessing services. AB589 is a positive effort to begin to address these barriers. We look forward to working with policy makers on additional opportunities to increase access, including increasing the number of mental health services providers who have the ability to communicate directly with the deaf and individuals who are hard of hearing, and who are familiar with deaf culture.

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Andrea Jones  
3244 N. 89th St.  
Milwaukee, WI 53222

Assembly Committee on Jobs and Economy  
Representative Adam Neylon (Chair)

RE: AB 589/SB 465 Support the Sign Language Interpreter Licensure Bill

Dear Honorable Chair and Committee Members:

My name is Andrea Jones and I am a sign language interpreter in the state of Wisconsin. I'm here today to ask for your support for AB 589.

In 2010, when the sign language interpreter law was first enacted, the goal was to align qualifications with the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf's National Interpreter Certification Exam. Still today, after receiving an initial license, a Wisconsin-resident interpreter has six years to pass that exam. The Deaf community tirelessly fought for over 20 years to raise the quality of interpreting services here in Wisconsin. However, at that time, no one could have predicted that by 2015, that exam pass rate would plummet to an embarrassing 17%. No one knew that RID would hold a performance exam moratorium between August 2015-September 2016, leaving pre-certified interpreters without an alternative route to achieve certification. No one expected that unethical, unlicensed interpreters would go virtually unpunished. No one anticipated that on September 1, 2017, nearly 10 percent of Wisconsin-resident sign language interpreters would have their licenses invalidated, myself included. But "the unexpected" became a reality.

Legislators, if a law is capable of intentionally slashing its workforce by 10 percent, it is a danger to itself. Because of a newly created interpreter shortage, it is putting businesses at risk of violating the Americans with Disabilities Act. Yes, sign language interpreters are in fact categorized under ADA as an accommodation for those who have a medical disability- in this case, a degree of hearing loss. With how the law is currently structured, unintentional harm is being imposed on the Deaf community and its allies.

But, just as the Deaf community and interpreting profession originally intended, I and 27 other pre-certified interpreters continued to work hard toward achieving national certification during our restricted license careers. I have mentored with RID-certified interpreters and Deaf community members. I have done countless hours of my own personal study and practice. I have also proactively sought the 2016 adopted alternative certification system- the BEI- to the tune of \$4,000. In essence, the BEI is a tiered testing system in which a Wisconsin-resident interpreter must pass not only one, but three successive exams to order to achieve an RID-equivalent certification. While I have successfully achieved my BEI-Basic Certification, the second of the required three exams, Wisconsin law still will not grant me any more time to pass that last performance exam- the BEI-Advanced.



Unless our current law is revised and replaced with AB 589, the interpreting pool will continue to decrease every two years, leaving even more interpreters out of work.

This cycle needs to stop.

Some would argue that Wisconsin graduates new interpreters annually, but the current law does not dictate which settings are appropriate for them to work in based on his or her skill level. To put this in perspective, right now a recent graduate interpreter, is lawfully able to interpret in life or death situations—even in legal settings like this committee hearing. Please know that the profession of interpreting is NOT simply attaching ASL signs to English words! It is so much more than that. It is actively processing linguistic meaning, restructuring two languages entirely, applying cultural equivalencies and nuances, etc. This is why a novice interpreter's seemingly innocent error on the job, can make the difference between life and death. Even though new interpreters enter the field each year, it does not mean they are necessarily qualified to effectively interpret in any and all settings.

Imagine yourself in a foreign country in a medical emergency. An interpreter is called to the scene, but he or she is not fluent in English. Suddenly, your access to critical medical information is contingent upon that interpreter's abilities (or lack thereof). Would you want to risk it? Then why should the Deaf community be forced to here in Wisconsin with sign language interpreters?

This is why it is crucial that Assembly Bill 589 pass.

If adopted, sign language interpreters will be appropriately placed into one of two licensure categories based on their current skill and credential: Intermediate or Advanced. These categories will protect Deaf consumers in critical situations (i.e. medical, legal, and mental health) by ensuring that that interpreter is appropriately credentialed.

Furthermore, if passed, Wisconsin will adopt the BEI tiering system in its entirety, putting interpreters like myself back to work. If the interpreter satisfies the requirements, each license granted will not have an expiration date, nor will it have a time restriction. So if interpreters need more time to pass a national certification exam, like myself, this law will give it to them without fear of losing their livelihood. Legislators, the Deaf community deserves more than a revolving door of pre-certified interpreters.

If it passes, unethical, unlicensed interpreters will be subject to a Sign Language Interpreting Board, where deaf, hard of hearing, and deaf-blind members partner alongside interpreters and community members. If caught working without a license or in violation of the profession's standard of ethics, the SLIB will have the authority to appropriately punish and reprimand the violator.

There are many more benefits to this bill that I have not mentioned, but even the reasons I have outlined is reason enough. It is important to know that Assembly Bill 589 has the teeth needed to accommodate for the unexpected.

I urge you to vote yes on this bill as it is moving Wisconsin in the right direction.

Thank you for your time and your support of AB 589.

## **Machgan, Miranda**

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**From:** Maziarka, Giorganne <maziarkg@uww.edu>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, November 29, 2017 4:27 PM  
**To:** Rep.Neylon; Rep.Brostoff  
**Subject:** AB 589/SB 465 Support the Sign Language Interpreter Licensure Bill

Assembly Committee on Jobs and Economy  
Representative Adam Neylon (Chair)

Dear Honorable Chair and Committee Members:

My name is Giorganne Maziarka. I oversee our Deaf and Hard of Hearing services (DHH) at the University of Wisconsin - Whitewater. I am in full support of the Sign Language Interpreter Licensure Bill being passed with expedience. Our DHH student population has increased to the extent that we have needed three full-time sign language interpreter/captionsist on staff for the past three years. The delay in changing the law impacted us this fall in that we were down to one staff that could interpret for students and university functions. This has impacted our organization directly in that we have had to hire contract interpreters as of 9/1/17, which impacts our budgets directly. A third renewal would put us back to three staff interpreters, which would fulfill our needs and not increase our budget.

It seems that when you have 50% or less failing a test, certification, or course that would be a problem with the test itself, assessor and/or instructor/professor. There are many individuals who have been interpreting for many years and many who have spent a great deal of money on education to move into a career interpreting. I really do not believe the education and experience they received is not preparing them to work in this field. The problem has been with the NIC and the assessors. I have been at Whitewater for five years and there have been few concerns with our interpreters which have related to their interpreting skills.

I urge to fully support this bill as well.

Sincerely,

Giorganne

Giorgianne Maziarka, MS, CRC

Employer Relations Specialist/

Disability Services Coordinator

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## **Machgan, Miranda**

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**From:** Landowski, Jodi R <landowsj@uww.edu>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, November 29, 2017 4:16 PM  
**To:** Rep.Neylon  
**Cc:** Rep.Brostoff  
**Subject:** AB589

Hello Representatives Neylon and Brostoff,

I am one of the many interpreters that would greatly benefit from the passing of Bill AB589, and I ask that you share my testimony with the whole committee for consideration.

I have been interpreting at the University of Wisconsin – Whitewater since January 2001. After gaining a few years of experience in my field, I decided I would sit for the National Interpreter Certification (NIC), a national test, put out by the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf. The aim of this test, when passed, was not only to set a standard, but to also show verification that the interpreter hired for the Deaf/Hard of Hearing (as well as hearing) consumer(s) college course, doctor appointment, job interview, or any other type of appointment, had the skill set required to do the job. The problem was, the fail rate of this test was extremely high, which lead to many very skilled interpreters failing the test multiple times. Myself being one of them.

In the midst of trying to pass the NIC, the license requirement came along for interpreters working in the state of Wisconsin. I would like you to understand, that as a candidate sitting for the NIC my typical wait time for results was 5-6 months. Upon finding I did not obtain passing results, I would then have to wait another 6 months before being allowed to sit for it again. It was a slow, very stressful process, and a mighty expensive one, only to find, again and again – and again - that I did not pass. Me and many others. Eventually, the test was frozen. And then eventually re-instated, but it is the same exact test. Go figure.

Then licensure came along for interpreters working in the state of Wisconsin, which I was able to obtain, but only for a limited time. Since this past September 1st, I have not been able to work as an interpreter in the state of Wisconsin.

I was stuck. I am stuck. Until now. Now is the time where I, and those in my position, need your support in passing the Interpreter Licensing Bill when it comes time to cast your vote. I have taken and passed Illinois BEI Test of English Proficiency as well as Illinois BEI – Basic Interpreting test, both to be accepted for granting licensure if this Bill is passed.

The director of my department here at UWW has been very supportive during this extremely frustrating, highly stressful situation, but there is only so much she can do. There is only so long she can keep me employed due to the fact that I am not interpreting. To be clear: I am facing the very real possibility of losing my job due to my license being expire.

I ask that your vote be "Yes".

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Jodi Landowski

## **Machgan, Miranda**

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**From:** Tom or Kathryn Harbison <katom.harbison@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, November 29, 2017 10:48 AM  
**To:** Rep.Neylon  
**Cc:** Rep.Brostoff  
**Subject:** AB589/SB465

My name is Tom Harbison, and I am from Delavan.

I AM FOR AB589/SB465.

I have been using sign language interpreters in many various situations all my life. I had taught sign language to people and aspiring interpreters for many years. I value the use of interpreter service very highly. It is not for me only but also on the other end.

I always believe in licensure or certification for sign language interpreters. It is key to ASSURING QUALITY as well as protecting us (both deaf and hearing) from fraud or substandard skills in critical situations such as education, employment, medical, and legal settings.

Would you feel comfortable securing a doctor's service when s/he is not licensed or certified by the Board? It is VERY COMPARABLE in the interpreting field. I must emphasize that interpreters are here for BOTH ENDS, deaf and hearing. Clear communication is a human right.

Thank you.

Please share my testimony with all members of the Committee. I urge you, the Committee, to support AB589/SB465.

Tom Harbison  
Delavan, WI

# AB589/SB465 Testimony

To whom it may concern:

My name is Cailin Yorot and I have been a full time Sign Language Interpreter in the Milwaukee/Madison area since May 2012. I am writing this testimony to help persuade all of you to please support AB589/SB465.

I would like to take a minute to explain my journey as an interpreter over the past 5 ½ years, and in doing so, also point out a few flaws in our current interpreter licensure. Of my graduating ITP (Interpreter Training Program) class 2012, only 3 of us are currently nationally certified which is required of us in the current law in order to maintain our license to work after 2 renewals (we renew every odd year). The remaining members of my class are either losing their license to work shortly or have transferred out of the field completely due to the outlandish passing rates of our national test.

Let me give a little more perspective on this, I have personally taken this national exam 6 times. I have spent *thousands* of dollars and man hours on exam fees, workshops, mentors, prep classes, written exams, state assessment exams and 5 years of full time work experience all to pass this test. It was the biggest emotional rollercoaster I have ever experienced. Having attended a 4 year university and accrued over 60,000 in debt to potentially of lost my dream job due to a 19% pass rate of a test is devastating.

Passing AB589/SB465 will not only ensure more interpreters the opportunity to work indefinitely but it will also decrease Deaf consumers need to wait on appointments to see doctors, business meetings, educational needs etc by having more interpreters available for them. This will *not* decrease the quality of interpreters, due to the fact we will now have limitations put in place as to where an uncertified interpreter can work versus now there are no limitations in the current law. Wisconsin is already in dire need of more interpreters. If we maintain our current license with a time limit of 2 renewals, we will potentially be losing good interpreters in this field like those in my graduating class.

Thank you for hearing all of us out today and I urge you to support AB589/SB465 for not only the Interpreter community but for the Deaf community as well.

Warm wishes,

Cailin Yorot, B.S, NIC Certified  
Aurora Health Care Medical Interpreter

## Machgan, Miranda

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**From:** Janet kunz <janetkunz@me.com>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, November 29, 2017 9:09 AM  
**To:** Rep.Neylon  
**Cc:** Rep.Brostoff  
**Subject:** AB589

Hello Committees:

My name is Janet Kunz, lives in Menomonee Falls, Wis. I am deaf as well as my husband. I am a membership secretary of Wisconsin Associated of the Deaf. Our number of membership are growing!!! they are all watching this bill to be pass. That is how important is it to them. I came and raised from a STRONG deaf family who relied on sign language as a form of communication.

I am writing this to SUPPORT this bill as written. I am not able to testify on Thursday due to work. But I will be following what will be happening tomorrow during the testimony. I utilized sign language interpreters as needed for my jobs such as cont. education courses, MD's appts, and etc....This bill is very critical to the deaf community as we all needed to be treated equally and fair.. We have every right to know what is being communicated to use via sign language interpreters. The current law is very weak, many interpreters are taking advantage of it. It is required to have a skilled interpreter to be able to interpret in any cases. The current law is discriminating against the newly graduated from Interpreter Training Program ( ITP). They need to get their experience of working in their interpreting field for the deaf before they actually can take the national level of certification. This new bill eliminated the timeline and i supported this. i understand that there are some people are against this bill. I don't think they take the time to learn about the new bill is that being proposed. For those who may tesfity against the bill , we need to find out what is their background of knowledge of interpreting process. OR they are the ones who are not license and wants to take advantage of the deaf community. That is a big NO NO!!!

The deaf community values our language as American Sign language. this is our only language we know and use daily. Please protect our language and our deaf consumers who rely heavily on sign language to communicated have equal access to the society. Qualified sign language interpreters are very IMPORTANT and i do depends on them to function well in a society that required spoken language.

Please when you hear any opposition, be sure you take the effort to find out what is thier background and see where they are coming from.

Thank you for supporting this bill and i am looking forward to positive outcome of this proposed bill.

Sincerely,  
Janet Kunz  
Menomonee Falls



11-27-2017

Jonathan Brostoff  
Room 420 North  
State Capitol  
PO Box 8952  
Madison, WI 53708

RE: AB 589/SB 465 - Support the Sign Language Interpreter Licensure Bill

Dear Honorable Wisconsin Legislative Committee

My name is Jessica Guzman and I am a resident in Milwaukee. As a constituent in your district, I want you to support AB 589/SB 465, which is the Sign Language Interpreter Licensure Bill. This bill is important to deaf, hard of hearing, deafblind, sign language interpreters and various stakeholders in our state. The bill will provide much needed protections for consumers by including better enforcement and oversight of sign language interpreters. In addition, it includes reasonable requirements for service providers that will ensure employment opportunities while maintaining high quality standards for consumers.

As a daughter to Deaf parents, my biggest concern is that they will not have the access to communication they need in medical situations. If my mother goes in for a routine checkup, and the health system is not required to hire quality, certified and licensed interpreters, she may have no idea what the doctor is telling her, which could have severely negative impacts on her health. If my mother were to submit a complaint about this particular interpreter, stating that he or she is not qualified to work in a medical environment, she needs an invested oversight committee to listen and take action so that this does not happen again to her or other Deaf persons. It's imperative that Deaf persons have qualified interpreters in any situation – medical or otherwise.

Due to changes in certification offerings on a national level, we need to ensure that interpreters have additional options to verify their qualifications to work in this profession. The proposed bill includes additional alternatives for certification, which is a minimum requirement that provides protections to the consumers we serve. AB 589/SB 465 will eliminate the restricted six-year terminal license and replace it with an indefinite license as long as certification and continuing education requirements are met. This will allow professionals to continue working and provide a larger pool of service providers to meet the many needs of consumers. AB 589/SB 465 includes a MOU between the Department of Safety and Professional Services and the Department of Public Instruction to bring clarity and agreement regarding the scope of work in K-12 settings and community settings. This bill proposes to establish an examining board that is comprised with a majority of consumers. Under the current law, the enforcement mechanisms are weak and have minimal impact on the oversight of ethical practices. The proposed board will be authorized to monitor and enforce the law and ensure safeguards are in place so that an already marginalized community is not further taken advantage of and suffer at the hands of unqualified and unethical practitioners.

It is my hope you seriously consider the points presented to you and offer your support to AB 589/SB 465, the Sign Language Interpreter Licensure Bill. The bill will lessen some of the restrictions and barriers to employment while balancing the needs of consumers to have high quality service providers. Please acknowledge your support of this bill. If you would like further information I would be happy to meet with you.

Sincerely,

Jessica Guzman  
1540 N Marshall Street  
Milwaukee, WI 53202  
jguzm219@gmail.com

AB589/SB465

Assembly Committee on Jobs and the Economy

Senate Committee on Public Benefits, Licensing, and State & Federal Law

November 25, 2017

I am Leslie DeMeyer from Cudahy WI currently working at Milwaukee Area Technical College. State Licensed DSPS 67-150 and National Certification in Sign Language Interpreting and Transliterating by the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID). I have been working in the profession of Sign Language Interpreting for 19 years. I also served as a post-secondary representative on the licensure committee working toward a state license for Sign Language Interpreters 2007-2010.

Our current licenses 150/151 under DSPS has several unintended loop-holes coupled by certification struggles nationwide where the test had been put on suspension for several months due to issues at the national level. The National Certification exam has been reinstated however there is still an incredibly low pass rate, nationwide around 21%. This has resulted in a recent loss of about 10% of interpreters in Wisconsin alone due to the unattainability of national certification required to move on to the renewable license.

My work as a post-secondary interpreter has suffered as I had lost several coworkers due to this situation. Myself and other renewable licensed interpreters have had to work overloads to cover the class assignments for Deaf and Hard of Hearing students. I also served as a mentor for several post-secondary interpreters as they work toward achieving national certification. I find my pre-certified colleagues fully capable and appropriately skilled to provide sign language interpreting services at a post-secondary level.

AB589/SB465 allows for pre-certified interpreters with the proper assessments, Wisconsin Interpreting and Transliterating Assessment or Bureau for Evaluation of Interpreters Basic (BEI), to provide interpreting services to the Deaf and Hard of Hearing communities in Post-secondary and Video Relay Services. This bill also requires interpreters working in Medical settings to hold a higher certification assessment through RID or BEI. You may have learned that there have been complaints filed by Deaf or Hard of Hearing persons regarding the skill level of interpreters in medical settings. AB589/SB465 will ensure that higher qualified interpreters will be properly licensed to work in medical settings.

Thank you for your time and consideration on this urgent matter. The Deaf and Hard of Hearing community, here in Wisconsin, have fought for 20 years to finally have a license in place for sign language interpreters which safeguards an expected level of skill and expertise for providing communication access services in every aspect of life. The passing of this bill will continue to protect the rights under the ADA by ensuring quality of Sign Language Interpreting services for Deaf/Hard of Hearing residents of Wisconsin as well as securing appropriate pathways to employment for qualified interpreters.

Respectfully,

Leslie DeMeyer

**Thomas D. Benziger**  
**2844 Oakmont Drive**  
**East Troy, WI 53120**  
**Tb71gally94@gmail.com**

November 27, 2017

Honorable Wisconsin Legislative Committee

Reference: **A589** and **SB465, Regulations of Sign Language Interpretation Services**

My name is Tom Benziger, I moved to East Troy Wisconsin from Chicago, Illinois in 2012. My past experiences while living in Chicago was to provide advocacy services to People with Disabilities including Deaf, Hard of Hearing and DeafBlind. We have accomplished quite a bit in State of Illinois, I was one of 11 appointed by Illinois Governor to serve the newly established Illinois Deaf and Hard of Hearing Commission (IDHHC) and I was the first Chairperson serving 102 counties in Illinois.

Now that I have moved to Wisconsin, I have witnessed so many wonderful programs that Wisconsin has to offer to Wisconsin constituents. However, Wisconsin has failed to provide adequate accessibility services to Deaf, Hard of Hearing and DeafBlind individuals. This includes hospitals, Mental Services, Natural Resources Department, ADRC, etc.

This bill will protect the Deaf community so we can have qualified and nationally recognized certified interpreters who are bound to follow Code of Ethics. In the past the situation between deaf consumer, interpreter and hearing person did not work due to incompetence of interpreters, we would have filed a formal complaint. However, DSPS has failed to review the complaint and/or disciplinary consequences.

This is the time we need to stop the non-certified or non-licensed person from assuming the role of interpreter. The trained interpreter needs to be involved in the Deaf Community to improve their signing skills.

State governments, hospitals, and other agencies need to have access to a list of certified and licensed interpreters, grouped by color code and by county. The list should be updated every day with licensed interpreters.

**I am asking you to please support AB589 and SB465.**

Respectfully yours,

Thomas D Benziger

## **Machgan, Miranda**

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**From:** Robert Rehbeck <rehbeck@wi.rr.com>  
**Sent:** Monday, November 27, 2017 10:34 PM  
**To:** Rep.Neylon  
**Cc:** Rep.Brostoff  
**Subject:** AB589

Hello,

I understand there will be a review of AB589 on Nov. 30<sup>th</sup>. While I don't fully understand what is to take place, I wanted to add my support that we need to continue to strengthen the Interpreter Licensure to ensure we have qualified skilled interpreters working in the state of Wisconsin.

I've heard some interpreters are struggling to pass their exams. I actually find it surprising considering the opportunities available to interpreters and serious students studying sign language. Today we have the use of the Internet that wasn't available 20 years ago. There are a lot of opportunities on the Internet (youtube for example) where Deaf people are posting Vlogs to express their opinions or share a joke all of which allows the Interpreter/student to study the Vlogs on their own or with other fellow Interpreters to practice their skills, their voicing skills and to confer with one another how something should be interpreted. I had to learn sign language on my own after high school and 34 years later I'm still learning, adjusting my signs and improving (I'm severely hard of hearing and while I can hear speech and talk I consider myself Deaf). Like English, I continue to learn new words...it is the same thing with Sign Language.

It is also important to get involved in the Deaf Community as this too will help interpreters improve their skills. I remember 20 years ago seeing serious Interpreters attending Deaf social events to continue and develop and they were the ones who were known as good, certified sign language interpreters that everyone hoped to get. Now, we only see a few interpreters or ITP students interacting within the Deaf Community. If a person is serious in making this their career, they have opportunities to improve and will find Deaf people willing to help them improve if they ask around.

I also have concerns about how the state can discipline an interpreter who takes on a job that wasn't a proper fit for their skills or breaks the Code of Ethics. For example an interpreter taking on mental health or legal interpreting without the proper background and training is inappropriate. The Interpreter needs to know when to decline a job or speak up and say I am not the right interpreter for the job. It seems some interpreters find loopholes and take on an interpreting job in another county or city.

Deaf people are still educating the public about our needs for an Interpreter. My husband and I still find barriers to getting an interpreter for medical, legal and banking situations without struggling to convince them why we need an interpreter. We also find Video Relay Interpreting to not be reliable and it has been frustrating experience. Anything we can do to help ensure we have qualified interpreters who understand a variety of Deaf people's sign language skills, who can read fingerspelling and know how to voice for someone appropriately is appreciated.

Thank you for your time and feel free to share this correspondence at the hearing.

Sincerely,

Kelly Rehbeck  
14530 Santa Rosa Drive  
Brookfield, WI 53005  
rehbeck@wi.rr.com

## Machgan, Miranda

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**From:** karen dishno <karen05d@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Monday, November 27, 2017 4:38 PM  
**To:** Rep.Neylon  
**Cc:** Rep.Brostoff  
**Subject:** ab589  
**Attachments:** Knowing Part 1.pdf; Knowing Part 2.pdf

I give permission to have this email share with all members of the committee as well as others as needed.

Dear Members,

I am writing to support this bill as written. I am not able to testify on Thursday as I am under time constraint.

I am deaf and utilized sign language interpreters as needed for my jobs as well as being a certified deaf interpreter (CDI). I am attaching two PDFs that clearly explained what the interpreters' roles in determining where to work and how important this bill is to the deaf community. I am also a secretary of Wisconsin Association of the Deaf (WAD). I was not on the interpreter licensure committee as my plate is too full with other commitments. I have been following this since the beginning and I am familiar with the current law as well as this proposed bill.

The current law is weak. I have encountered some interpreters who are no where near to be qualified to interpret in a situation that required a skilled interpreter. In this particular situation, I have no means to file any complaints against this interpreter because she met all the requirements as written in the law. However, one thing I do have a control over is who do I work with. Luckily, this person works for an agency and I have requested NOT to work with her again. However, as a college graduate, I cringed that she is "available" to interpret at other situations that the deaf consumers may have no control of who will interpret for them. She is doing more harm than good and she does not realized this. With the proposed bill, establishment of SLIEB will help with this situation.

The current law is discriminating against those newly graduated from an interpreter training program. It is almost impossible for anyone to achieve a national level of certification without years of experience. The proposed bill eliminate the timeline and I support this. I hope in the near future, that a program will be created to address the gap currently missing to help those to develop their skills further and experience to enter workforce. There is a program addressing this, however, it is not based in Wisconsin.

I am aware of controversy facing this bill by outside people. I struggled to understand where they are coming from. I firmly believed they have no ground to prove that this proposed bill will do more harm than good. I am wondering if these people did not take the time to learn about this bill and decide to get involved at the last minute. Those who who may testify against the bill, I am concerned about what is their background or knowledge of interpreting process that they may not fully understand. So please when you hear any opposition, make effort to find out what their backgrounds are or where they were coming from.

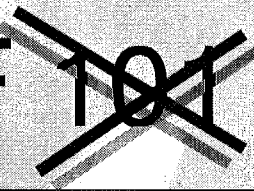
My only concern with this bill, and I have expressed this with the committee that they should not locked themselves into specific certification process that is currently in the proposed bill. I suggested that the wording to be current certification process and let the administrative rules spell out the certification names available currently or in the future.

American sign language is deaf people's language, not anyone else, it goes the same for Native Americans' language which is uniquely theirs plus all other foreign languages that belongs to specific cultures. Spoken language is very different and involved listening and speaking whereabout the sign language involves speaking, listening, using hands and ability to read sign language through eyes. So please protect our language and our deaf consumers who rely on sign language to communicate and have equal access to the society. Qualified sign language interpreters are very important and I depend on them to function in a society that required spoken language.

Thank you for supporting this bill and I look forward to positive outcome of this proposed bill.

Sincerely,  
Karen Dishno  
Rio

# DEAF



# 2-5-8

## Knowing what we don't know...

[Click here](#) for signed version.

"The Dunning-Kruger effect is a cognitive bias in which **low-ability individuals** suffer from **illusory superiority**, *mistakenly assessing their ability as much higher than it really is*. This person will fail to recognize the extent of their inadequacy.

THE  
**Dunning-Kruger**  
Effect



This concept is applicable to many professions, including interpreting. A hiring agency typically has no way of judging whether an interpreter is qualified and depends on the referring agency or interpreter themselves to make this judgement. This can be a slippery slope (see above) as the interpreter may BELIEVE they are qualified.

Examples can include an interpreter who:

- has no legal training interpreting for a complicated court proceeding.
- is pre-nationally certified with a high school degree interpreting for a deaf person earning a Ph.D.
- has no specialized training in working with language dysfluent clients and interprets the same way they do for everyone else.
- is a novice interpreter still developing their own sign skills, interpreting for a young deaf child in an educational setting. When the child has no or extremely limited language exposure.
- Has no specialized training in mental health and interprets for a psychiatric appointment

It is important for the agency to be able to independently vet **any interpreter** that they work with and to consider the deaf consumer's assessment regarding competency.

## Knowing what we don't know...Part 2

Click [here](#) for signed version.

Last year, 258 discussed the Dunning-Kruger effect (a cognitive bias in which individuals mistakenly assess their ability as much higher than it really is) as it related to the responsibility of hiring entities to vet interpreters.

However, **interpreters** also have a **responsibility** to try to understand their own **competencies and weaknesses** and to aptly judge their **suitability for an assignment**.



Hearing people routinely believe that all "interpreters" are created equally. Therefore, hiring determination is often akin to putting the **mouse in charge of the cheese**...sometimes this results in interpreters who are not qualified taking assignments without realizing the harm that they are doing.

The harm is multifold (*not an exhaustive listing*):

- Harming the deaf person's understanding and access to information which impacts their lives. Creating perceptions that the deaf person is not intelligent when they make decisions based on partial information.
- Harming the agency/hearing person's ability to accurately convey information to the deaf person, and worse believing they did so.
- Harmful to the interpreting field because it distorts the understanding of what a qualified interpreter is, perpetuates the belief that anyone who signs is an interpreter, or that because the unqualified interpreter caused confusion-the agency can save money and have the same level of communication (i.e. confusion) by just writing notes.

ask yourself if you are acting "beyond your years" when it comes to the scope of your role  
-  
see a skill you don't have? learn it  
-  
put yourself in the other person's shoes:  
would you hire you?

## Machgan, Miranda

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**From:** Joel Mankowski <deafcopper@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Monday, November 27, 2017 11:55 AM  
**To:** Rep.Neylon  
**Cc:** Rep.Brostoff  
**Subject:** AB 589/SB 465 (Interpreters Licensure Bill)

Dear the Honorable Representative Neylon,

My name is Joel Mankowski, from Greenfield. I have been a Sign Language Interpreters Council (SLIC) member under the Department of Safety and Professional Services since 2011. I would like to testify my comments at the Assembly Committee on Jobs and the Economy public hearing on November 30th regarding to the new Interpreters Licensure Bill in which I strongly favor for.

I have two reasons why I favor for the new bill. First, I feel that SLIC is not strong to enforce the current law (Act 360 of 2010) because the council is merely an advisory council that does not support both interpreting and deaf and hard of hearing communities much. I have an insufficient number of SLIC members because many deaf/hh and licensed interpreters lost interested in applying for any position at the Council. They want a stronger examining board to enforce the law, not an advisory board. We have been frustrated with the lack of interested candidates to occupy vacant seats (we lost 3 council members insofar). The Council meetings had been cancelled several times due to not meeting the majority of quorum. That's why I favor for the bill so we can have a better examining board in which members can vote and regulate the licensure bill without replying on the consent of the Department. The Department has no depth of knowledge on interpreting issues and showed little action on grievances that plagued us for five years. Therefore, it is not workable or enforceable. How can we improve it if it is not workable?

I feel that bill can enable the Board to regulate the law more effective and us to file more grievances in order. If the bill dies, we would be stuck with the old SLIC that is still broken. We cannot afford more broken pipes anymore.

Secondly, I feel that Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty, does not understand how interpreters work. Interpreters are merely professionals with higher education degrees. Unlike hairdressers and barbers, interpreters had spend more years to complete their qualification. Certifications are the measurement of qualification, not enforcement. If they said interpreters are certified without a license, then it should be good enough. It is not good enough. How can I enforce interpreters if they do not comply? Where can we file grievances? Who will enforce it? It defeats our purpose to protect both service providers and consumers (both deaf/hh and hearing). It

would be a very dangerous territory for both service providers and consumers. The new bill can solve that problem so every interpreters will get both certified and licensed. It will mitigate our headaches.

Without enforcement, certified interpreters would get away with it and keep in employment. Safety is not there. Why do we need car licenses?

Because we need regulations to protect us from harmful or reckless accidents. That's the safety. We need a safety for service providers and consumers. We need more regulations and stronger enforcement to protect us from unnecessary incidents. Thus both quality and safety are our top priority. I strongly believe that new bill can serve both quality and safety as well as for the good of the people in Wisconsin.

Please support the bill for our safety.

Thanks for your time and consideration,  
Joel Mankowski  
Registered Voter



To Whom It May Concern,

My name is Casey Thomm. I'm a sign language interpreter in the Milwaukee area. Until recently, I held a restricted license under DSPS to interpret for the Deaf community in Wisconsin. I am part of the 10% of interpreters who lost their license on September 1st and I need to get back to work to support my family. I'm here to ask for your support of AB589/SB465 (Formerly LRB 4250.)

To explain what we're dealing with - the way the current law for interpreters is written - there are 2 DSPS licenses for sign language interpreters: a restricted license and a permanent license. When the current law was established, it was the expectation that restricted users would only need up to three licensing cycles to pass a specific test and obtain a national certification under the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf. Passing that test, the National Interpreter Certification (the NIC) allows one to obtain a permanent DSPS license. It is nearly impossible for a recent graduate to pass the NIC right out of college. One must work for a few years to develop their interpreting skills before they're able to pass the NIC.

DSPS carries two-year license cycles, where everyone must renew their license at the same time - August 31st of the odd year. If an interpreting student graduated on the even year, they were allowed to hold a restricted license for up to five years. If they graduated on an odd year, they were allowed up to six years. That one year difference is crucial to an interpreter's pathway to obtaining a permanent license. I graduated from my Interpreter program in 2012 and was allotted five years to obtain the permanent license.

I have been personally affected by the way the current law is written and I need to see it changed. I held two jobs as an interpreter - one in a Video Relay Setting (VRS), interpreting for phone calls between Deaf and hearing people, and the other in a K-12 environment. Since I have run out of license renewals, I am currently on an indefinite hiatus from my VRS job, therefore affecting my livelihood along with any chances of continued skill development through that setting. How can I continue to develop my skillset if I am not allowed to work?

Some interpreters who only worked in settings such as VRS, Community, or Post-Secondary Interpreting for Deaf adults lost their job completely when they could no longer renew their restricted license. Fortunately for me, I also hold full-time employment in a K-12 environment. Until September 1st of this year, I was dual licensed, meaning I am licensed through DPI, to interpret for Deaf children, and I was licensed through DSPS to interpret for our Deaf staff and Deaf parents in my school district.

My K-12 employment has also been impacted by my license lapsing. Both of my licenses were used equally by my school. We had four DSPS licensed interpreters who all had their licenses lapse this cycle. Legally, our staff interpreters are no longer allowed to interpret for Deaf staff or for Deaf parents who come in for meetings or conferences. I used to be able to interpret for daily staff meetings and Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings. Every day, my school is now

paying for multiple agency interpreters to come and do the job that our staff interpreters were able to do in the past. This is causing a financial burden on a school that has already experienced many budgetary challenges.

AB589/SB465 includes no time limitations for those who hold a restricted license. While it is ideal that everyone who has a restricted license will pursue a permanent license, interpreters won't be held to an arbitrary five to six year time limit to obtain a permanent license. Passing this bill into law means myself and many others in the state can get back to work; that is, if they haven't already left the field of interpreting.

You may wonder: "You had five or six years to get the permanent license; why aren't you qualified to pass that test and obtain a permanent license by now?" The pathway to obtaining a permanent license is challenging, to say the least. The NIC test is expensive to take and candidates typically have to take it multiple times, working with mentors and seeking hours of professional development to receive a passing score. Feedback on one's performance is nonexistent. One is just told "pass" or "fail," with a numerical score. The test results don't identify where points were lost, so one doesn't know what skills need to be focused on for their re-take. Since 2012, only about 25 people in Wisconsin have been able to obtain passing results for this test, and at least two of them have moved out of state since then. It's hard to say how many others have attempted to take this exam and have not yet been able to pass it.

Additionally, no one would have been able to predict the dismal current political climate of our national interpreting organization or the recent decline of the RID NIC performance exam. Since 2010, the national testing pass rate has decreased to 19%. Politically, the organization is in shambles and many members have developed a huge distrust of RID. Recent scandals have challenged the validity of the test; so much so that the test was put on moratorium for a year, preventing anyone from taking it.

For so long, Wisconsin law has been contingent on passing the RID NIC to permanently license our interpreters. The current law has only recently been amended to include another pathway to obtaining permanent licensure through a separate testing entity, the Board of Evaluators of Interpreters (the BEI.) The BEI is a third-party test developed in Texas that is not affiliated with the membership organization of RID. Five states currently accept the BEI for their state licensure. Wisconsin recognizes the BEI-Advanced test as equivalent to the NIC, thus allowing one to get a permanent DSPS license if they can pass that particular test. However, Wisconsin does not host this exam, and the nearest testing site is in Springfield, Illinois. While many interpreters are now on the BEI pathway, it is still a challenge to obtain as one must first pass a written BEI exam, a BEI-Basic performance exam and then the BEI-Advanced exam. If you fail any of these along the way, there is a six month waiting period and the test is also very costly - even more so for Wisconsin residents who pay an out of state fee to take the exam in Illinois.

Outside of paying for my education and degree in Interpreting I have personally invested thousands of dollars into professional development workshops, organization memberships and

testing fees, travel arrangements, and other expenses to keep myself both current and valid in the field. I do not want to give up on my career like so many others have been forced to do. Please help me and so many others get back to work serving the Deaf community of this state.

This bill was written for the people and by the people. The Wisconsin Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (WisRID) and the WI Association of the Deaf (WAD) have collaborated in creating this bill to enhance the current law, close any existing loopholes, and ensure it accommodates the needs of the Wisconsin Deaf community. The Deaf/Interpreting community is already unique and misunderstood by the masses. Our small community has worked very hard to come up with solutions to problems that affect our Wisconsin Deaf community. However, passing this bill will also benefit hiring entities and interpreters. The Deaf community has endorsed this bill into becoming law. I implore you to support this bill.

Thank you for your consideration in supporting AB589/SB465.  
Casey Thomm

AB589/SB465

Assembly Committee on Jobs and the Economy

Senate Committee on Public Benefits, Licensing, and State & Federal Law

November 25, 2017

I am Leslie DeMeyer from Cudahy WI currently working at Milwaukee Area Technical College. State Licensed DSPS 67-150 and National Certification in Sign Language Interpreting and Transliterating by the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID). I have been working in the profession of Sign Language Interpreting for 19 years. I also served as a post-secondary representative on the licensure committee working toward a state license for Sign Language Interpreters 2007-2010.

Our current licenses 150/151 under DSPS has several unintended loop-holes coupled by certification struggles nationwide where the test had been put on suspension for several months due to issues at the national level. The National Certification exam has been reinstated however there is still an incredibly low pass rate nationwide around 21% pass rate. This has resulted in a recent loss of about 10% of interpreters in Wisconsin alone due to the unattainability of achieving national certification to move on to the renewable license.

My work as a post-secondary interpreter has suffered as I had lost several coworkers due to this situation. Myself and other renewable licensed interpreters have had to work overloads to cover the class assignments for Deaf and Hard of Hearing students. I have also served as a mentor for several post-secondary interpreters as they work toward achieving national certification. I find my pre-certified colleagues fully capable and appropriately skilled to provide sign language interpreting services at a post-secondary level.

AB589/SB465 allows for pre-certified interpreters with the proper assessments, Wisconsin Interpreting and Transliterating Assessment or Bureau for Evaluation of Interpreters Basic (BEI), to provide interpreting services to the Deaf and Hard of Hearing communities in Post-secondary and Video Relay Services. This bill also requires interpreters working in Medical settings to hold a higher certification assessment through RID or BEI. You may have learned that there have been complaints filed by Deaf or Hard of Hearing persons regarding the skill level of interpreters in medical settings. AB589/SB465 will ensure that higher qualified interpreters will be properly licensed to work in medical settings.

Thank you for your time and consideration on this urgent matter. The Deaf and Hard of Hearing community, here in Wisconsin, have fought for 20 years to finally have a license in place for sign language interpreters which safeguards an expected level of skill and expertise for providing communication access services in every aspect of life. The passing of this bill will continue to protect the rights under the ADA by ensuring quality of Sign Language Interpreting services for Deaf/Hard of Hearing residents of Wisconsin as well as securing appropriate pathways to employment for qualified interpreters.

Respectfully,

Leslie DeMeyer



10243 W National Ave  
West Allis, WI 53227

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November 28, 2017

Representative Adam Neylon, Chair  
Room 125 West State Capitol PO Box 8953  
Madison, WI 53708

RE: AB589/SB465 - Support the Sign Language Interpreter Licensure Bill

Dear Representative Neylon,

As a working sign language interpreter, and the manager of an interpreting agency, I respectfully request your support of AB589/SB465, which is the Sign Language Interpreter Licensure Bill. This bill is important to deaf people, hard of hearing people, deafblind individuals, sign language interpreters, and various stakeholders in our state. The bill will provide much needed protections for consumers by including better enforcement and oversight of sign language interpreters. In addition, it includes reasonable requirements for service providers that will ensure employment opportunities while maintaining high quality standards for consumers.

I am the manager of a sign language interpreter agency in West Allis; brother of a deaf sister; a hard of hearing consumer myself; a community interpreter; and a member of various organizations such as the Wisconsin Association of the Deaf (WAD), and the Wisconsin Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (WisRID); I feel I bring multiple perspectives and insights regarding the need to maintain and improve the license for sign language interpreters.

There have been changes in certification offerings on a national level. As a hiring manager for interpreters in Wisconsin, we need to ensure that interpreters have additional options to verify their qualifications to work in this profession. I am losing staff because of the signal certification which is under a time restraint to master. The proposed bill includes:

1. Additional alternatives for certification, which is can provides protections to the consumers we serve.
2. AB589/SB465 will provide an indefinite license, as long as certification and continuing education requirements are met. This will allow interpreters to continue working and provide a larger pool of individuals to meet the many needs of the consumers. On any given week as an agency, I turn down from 20 to 30 jobs for consumers, because of the lack of qualified interpreters to complete those jobs.
3. AB589/SB465 includes a MOU between the Department of Safety and Professional Services and the Department of Public Instruction to bring clarity and agreement regarding the scope of work in K-12 settings and community settings.
4. This bill proposes to establish an examining board that is comprised with a majority of consumers. The proposed board will be authorized to monitor and enforce the law. This will provide the protection our consumers need, so they are not taken advantage of and suffer at the hands of unqualified and unethical practitioners.



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Page 2

It is my hope you seriously consider the points presented to you and offer your support to AB589/SB465, the Sign Language Interpreter Licensure Bill. The bill will lessen some of the restrictions and barriers to employment while balancing the needs of consumers to have high quality service providers.

Please acknowledge your support of this bill! If you would like further information I would be happy to do so.

Sincerely;

**Jim Hagen**  
Manager and Interpreter  
10243 W National Ave.  
West Allis, WI 53227  
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Dana Gordon  
W828 Florence Road  
Genoa City, WI 53128  
November 27, 2017

Assembly Committee on Jobs and Economy, Representative Adam Neylon  
RE: AB589/SB 465 In Support of Sign Language Interpreter Licensure Bill

Dear Honorable Chair and Committee Members:

My name is Dana Gordon and I am an American Sign Language (ASL) Interpreter, C-Print Captionist, and Disability Services Coordinator at the University of Wisconsin Whitewater, and I am in full support of this new licensure bill. I am very active with the Wisconsin Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (WisRID). I am a board member, and served conference planning committees since 2012. My love for this field actually started back in the sixth grade. There were three deaf girls in my classroom with an Interpreter, and I was instantly fascinated. I became lifelong friends with the girls in my class, and instantly knew I wanted to become an Interpreter.

I graduated from the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee's Interpreter Training Program in 2012. After working in several settings I have found that my passion is in the post-secondary setting, so much so, that I actually earned a Master's Degree in Higher Education Leadership this past May 2017 from the University of Wisconsin Whitewater.

It is imperative for licensure to be in place for Sign Language Interpreters in order to provide quality services to our Deaf community. However, the current licensing system for Sign Language Interpreters in Wisconsin is ineffective. Statistics show that only 2 students out of each graduating class of Interpreter Training Programs are passing the tests necessary for the permanent license in Wisconsin. Not to mention the added stresses of the time limits placed on interpreters in regards to licensure.

Personally, I have taken the National Interpreter Certification (NIC) test twice, and the first time I took the test I actually passed both sections of the test, however my overall score was not high enough to pass. After working with mentors my score dramatically dropped. The scoring, along with the 17% pass rate (at the time), were not numbers of encouragement. I also took two different workshops that were designed to prep Interpreters for the NIC, and even after these efforts I did not pass. After failing the test, interpreters must wait six months to re-take it, and there was a moratorium where no one could take the test which all ate into the time constraints for passing the test.

I did also take of the Board for Evaluation of Interpreters (BEI) tests, which has been recently accepted in Wisconsin, and I have passed the Test of English Proficiency and the Basic level test. I am currently waiting on results for the Advanced level test. There are a total of four levels to the BEI test, and in order to obtain licensure currently in Wisconsin, an interpreter must pass at least through the third level, the Advanced test. This causes hardship on interpreters as well, because the closest place you can take the exam is Springfield, IL, which is a four-hour drive for

me one way. This makes it a long process as well, however the passing of the new bill will make the process shorter and less stressful.

This is impacting many lives, and not only interpreters seeking licensure, but also interpreters that are already certified. There is a shortage of interpreters in the state of Wisconsin already, then when you take away a large chunk of interpreters' ability to work, it puts a strain on those interpreters that are left. I am not able to attend the hearing for this bill on November 30, 2017 because I was unable to find a substitute to cover the classes I interpret and caption for at the university. This problem is only going to become worse as more and more interpreters are forced to stop working due to their licenses lapsing. The state will be losing skilled and qualified interpreters due to the current law. I even work with an interpreter that has been working in this field for 15 years that cannot interpret anymore.

Therefore, I ask you to support this new bill for Sign Language Interpreters in the state of Wisconsin. It will keep all of our qualified Interpreters working, will save many people's jobs, and will improve the lives of the Deaf community.

Thank you for your consideration,

Dana Gordon

Dana Gordon, MSE

[gordondk@uww.edu](mailto:gordondk@uww.edu)



November 29, 2017

Representative Rob Hutton  
Room 220 North  
State Capitol  
PO Box 8952  
Madison, WI 53708

RE: AB 589/ SB 465-Support the Sign Language Interpreter Licensure Bill

Dear Representative Hutton, Nylon, and Brostoff,

My name is Krista Gregory and I am a current resident of Wauwatosa. As a constituent in your district, I want you to support AB 589/SB 465, which is the Sign Language Interpreter Licensure Bill. This bill is important to deaf, hard of hearing, deafblind, sign language interpreters and various stakeholders in our state. The bill will provide much needed protections for consumers by including better enforcement and oversight of sign language interpreters. In addition, it includes reasonable requirements for service providers that will ensure employment opportunities while maintaining high quality standards for consumers.

I am an interpreter coordinator for a sign language interpreting agency in Wisconsin, have interpreted within the community for the past four years as a restricted licensed interpreter, and have stayed active within the community serving in a variety of settings.

Due to changes in certification offerings on a national level, we need to ensure that interpreters have additional options to verify their qualifications to work in this profession. The proposed bill includes additional alternatives for certification, which is a minimum requirement that provides protections to the consumers we serve. AB 589/ SB 465 will eliminate the restricted six-year terminal license and replace it with an indefinite license as long as certification and continuing education requirements are met. This will allow professionals to continue working and provide a larger pool of service providers to meet the many needs of consumers. AB 589/SB 465 includes a MOU between the Department of Safety and Professional Services and the Department of Public Instruction to bring clarity and agreement regarding the scope of work in K-12 settings and community settings. This bill proposes to establish an examining board that is comprised with a majority of consumers. Under the current law, the enforcement mechanisms are weak and have minimal impact on the oversight of ethical practices. The proposed board will be authorized to monitor and enforce the law and ensure safeguards are in place so that an already marginalized community is not further taken advantage of and suffer at the hands of unqualified and unethical practitioners.

The proposed bill will help to ensure that those, like myself, who have a current time constraint of a six year limit on current license to continue with employment as we adapt to changes impacted by our national organization. Of equal importance, as an agency interpreter coordinator I am aware that we have limited state regulations on where we place interpreters

for jobs in the community based off of our current license. Bill AB 589/SB 465 will help to ensure that interpreters are being placed in appropriate settings based off of their skill qualification level to help ensure the safety of the deaf community that we serve.

It is my hope you seriously consider the points presented to you and offer your support to AB 589/ SB 465, the Sign Language Interpreter Licensure Bill. The bill will lessen some of the restrictions and barriers to employment while balancing the needs of consumers to have high quality service providers. Please acknowledge your support of this bill.

Sincerely,

Krista Gregory  
1524 N. 68th St.  
Wauwatosa, WI 53213  
kristadorlene@gmail.com

Thank you Representative Neylon and all members of the Assembly Committee on Jobs and the Economy for taking time out of your day to read my letter.

My name is Brittany Peters. I have been in the field of sign language interpreting for the last seven and a half years. I would like to share my personal story with you on how the current Sign Language Interpreter Law, Wisconsin Act 360 has directly impacted my life and my career. It is my hope that through my story, you will seriously consider and support the bill AB589 for the Sign Language Interpreter License.

I graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UWM) in May 2010 with a major in sign language interpreting and a minor in American Sign Language Studies. I hold my Department of Public Instruction (DPI) Educational Interpreter License #0020 which allows me to interpret for Deaf and Hard of Hearing students in a K12 educational setting. I held my Sign Language Interpreter License-Restricted from the Department of Safety & Professional Services (DSPS) for four years and seven months, not for the six years that are possible under the present law. The DSPS restricted license allowed me to interpret for Deaf adults and children in most community settings. Currently an interpreter who holds a DSPS restricted license is only allowed to renew it two times and then must pass a certification test to obtain the DSPS renewable license. If a certification test is not passed the interpreter can no longer work in the community settings because they do not have a valid license.

In the current law the number of years you are able to hold the DSPS restricted license depends on when you received the initial license. For example, I was required to apply for the license in December 2010, pay \$75.00 and was granted my restricted license on January 24, 2011. Only seven months later, I was required to renew my restricted license for the first time in August 2011 and pay another \$75.00 license fee (this should have never happened). In August 2013, I renewed my DSPS restricted license for the last time and paid a \$75.00 license fee. On September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015, my DSPS restricted license expired because I renewed it two times and had not passed the National Interpreter Certification test offered through the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID).

Since August 2010 I have been a full-time sign language interpreter in a school district. For one and a half years I worked in the classroom interpreting for Deaf and Hard of Hearing students. For three and a half years I interpreted for Deaf staff members and students. On September 1, 2015, I relinquished my position interpreting for Deaf staff due to my license expiring. Fortunately, I had a job where I could be moved back to interpreting for Deaf and Hard of Hearing students. However, I had put all my energy into working to get national certification so I could hold both a DSPS and DPI license. When my DSPS restricted license expired, my confidence was deflated to nothing and I was mad because I was misled to believe that I could hold the restricted license for six years no matter when I received my initial license. It was not until November 2014 that I was given the correct information.

I did everything I could to keep my DSPS restricted license. I emailed DSPS several different times. I made several attempts to appeal, asking for an extension on my restricted license, but was informed the law did not allow for extensions to be granted. I asked DSPS for clarification on the law, but they were unable to interpret the law for me.

Prior to my license expiring, I worked part-time at Sorenson Communications for two years as a video relay interpreter interpreting for phone calls between Deaf and hearing individuals. In addition, I worked for an interpreter agency part-time and did some independent freelance interpreting. As a result of my license expiring I was no longer able to work these part-time jobs which severely affected my livelihood, my emotional health, and mental health. In addition, I was denied the opportunity to improve my skills through the wealth of real world experiences and variety these part time jobs offered me.

Just as in many professions doctors, teachers, lawyers improve their skills by working in the field daily, the same is true for sign language interpreters. We grow and improve our skills by working in the field every day and overcoming the challenges we are faced with in the moment. This is not something we can read in a book and study; we have to actively engage in the work.

I am asking that you support AB589 so that none of my colleagues have to go through what I went through. Having my license expire while I was actively trying to pass a certification test that had a 19% passing rate, receiving mentoring to improve my skills from several colleagues and working in the field to gain the experience I needed, should not have resulted in my license expiring without being granted an extension. That defeats the purpose of an interpreter trying to improve their skills.

Supporting AB589 means that interpreters will not be restricted to a timeline of when they have to pass a test in order to keep their license. As long as they continue to maintain their license, they will be able to keep it and work. This allows for interpreters to continue to grow, gain experience and improve their skills in the work force while continuing to try to pass a certification test. Under the current law the Sign Language Interpreter License-Restricted can only be renewed twice before it expires. This has caused interpreter shortages in our community. On September 1, 2017 between 20 to 30 sign language interpreters' restricted licenses expired. Many interpreters who contacted DSPS have received a one-year extension on their restricted license, but if this bill is not passed and if those interpreters struggle to pass certification tests next year in September those individuals will not be able to work out in the community. This will cause a major shortage of interpreters that will lead to the Deaf community not being able to receive the equal access that is their right to have under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

This law will not help me get my DSPS restricted license back, but it will help several of my colleagues to be able to keep their licenses. No one should ever have something stripped from them that they have worked so hard for and continue to work towards. Please vote in favor of AB589. The Deaf Community, interpreter community and the state of Wisconsin need AB589 to become a law. If you have any questions or would like more information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Respectfully,

Brittany Peters  
2616 N. Frederick Avenue Apt. 324  
Milwaukee, WI 53211  
[bmpeters0917@gmail.com](mailto:bmpeters0917@gmail.com)  
(920) 321-8769

November 30, 2017

RE: AB589/SB465 - Support the Sign Language Interpreter Licensure Bill

Dear Representative Neylon and members of the Assembly Committee on Jobs and the Economy,

My name is Scottie Allen and I am a constituent in Representative Brostoff's district. I have been working as a sign language interpreter in the state of Wisconsin since 2010. While I am unable to testify in person, I ask that you accept my written testimony in support of AB 589/SB465, the Sign Language Interpreter Licensure Bill.

While Wisconsin Act 360 (2009) was a great first step in establishing minimum qualifications to work as a sign language interpreter in the state of Wisconsin, like any law, it needs to be revisited and revised. In the years since it has passed, loopholes and other problems have occurred that could not have been predicted. This proposed bill, AB589/SB465, has been a 2+ year collaboration between the sign language interpreting community, Deaf community and it's various stakeholders. This bill will help get our interpreters working again.

Sign language interpreters in the United States have been nationally certified through the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID). Unfortunately, RID was hit with a scandal that included embezzlement and fraudulent evaluation of certification tests. This resulted in RID executing an internal risk assessment, which included reviewing their certification process and thus a moratorium on many of it's certification tests. This included the NIC, a certification test that current DSPS restricted licensed interpreters needed to take, in order to earn a DSPS unrestricted license.

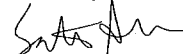
Unfortunately the licensure clock was still running for DSPS restricted interpreters who only have two renewal cycles to pass this test. They were also faced with a test that had a pass rate of less than 20%, substantially lower than previous tests. These two factors combined forced many interpreters out of work, including approximately 25 in this last renewal cycle. This has caused the shortage of interpreters to worsen. AB589/SB465 would allow these interpreters to continue to work, using the minimum qualifications set by the yellow/intermediate license but now restricting them from high risk settings (legal, mental health and medical). With this proposed bill, they can continue to build upon their skills, pass a certification test and earn their green/advance license.

Furthermore, to avoid situations like this again, DSPS has now accepted a new certification system, the BEI from the state of Texas (which is not currently offered in Wisconsin unlike the NIC, offered at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee). The minimum standards between the two certifications are different, thus a new licensure law needs to be established in order to even the playing field between these systems. AB589/SB465 does just this.

Sign language interpreting has long been seen as a technical professional and it is only recently that we have realized we are a practice profession, similar to those of medical professionals. We are not machines who do repetitive work where everything is constant with no variables to consider. We, as interpreters, are people working with at least two other people who don't understand each others language or culture. There are so many variables at hand, ranging from people's world views, feelings, morals and more. Based on all these factors, we have to make quick decisions, decisions we don't take lightly, that affect all individuals involved. It is a profession that has a severe shortage of interpreters and will continue this way if AB589/SB465 is not passed. When businesses cannot find qualified interpreters they are unable to provide good services and fail to meet the Americans with Disabilities Act standards, leading to legal situations that no one wants to be involved in. AB589/SB465 is a piece of legislation that improves upon the foundation laid by Act 360 and keeps our interpreters working.

Thank you for your time. Please support AB589/SB465.

Sincerely,



Scottie Allen, MA, NIC, Q-MHI, EIPA 4.7  
WI DSPS and DPI licensed

Nationally Certified Sign Language Interpreter (NIC): Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf  
Qualified Mental Health Interpreter (QMHI): State of Alabama, Department of Mental Health Services: Office of Deaf Services  
Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment (EIPA) 4.7/5.0: Boystown National Research Hospital

Representative Neylon,

Would you please share my testimony with the full committee? Thank you.

I worked closely with the Deaf, Hard-of-Hearing, Deafblind, and Interpreter communities and then-Senator Kedzie to vet, draft and pass our current sign language interpreter statute. One of the proudest moments of my life was to stand next to Senator Kedzie at the signing ceremony. Our license has dramatically improved the quality and expanded the reach of interpreting services across the state in the last 7 years.

I support updating our license with AB 589 as written for three key reasons.

First, to address the ongoing need for quality interpreters, AB 589 opens up the lower tier to beginning practitioners by limiting the scope of their work to match their skill level while removing the expiration of their licensing. If they do not achieve the higher skills tier, they may continue to work in the community at their level, expanding our pool.

Secondly, AB 589 expands and updates all our testing qualifications to encourage new practitioners, including much-needed Deaf Interpreters, to enter and stay in the field. By making credentialing more elastic we both maintain critical quality standards and relieve unintended testing burdens residual in the current law because of changes at the national and state testing levels.

Third, AB 589 adds a review and enforcement arm sorely missing now by establishing a new Sign Language Interpreter's Examining Board. While our community has seen great compliance in hiring under our license and increased satisfaction from consumers, for the instances when valid complaints have arisen, consumers have had no recourse. Prosecutors have taken no interest. No penalties have been meted out. New technologies have muddied the waters. While this may not initially strike you as concerning, consider that what interpreters do really can be life-altering for good or for bad. We deliver information in situations from birth to death. Unqualified persons must be removed. Consider that there is currently a national video relay service provider named Purple hiring unlicensed interpreters in Madison because they know they won't be challenged. The Sign Language Interpreter's Examining Board in AB 589 will have the teeth to deal with such improprieties.

I thank you for your time and consideration,

Colleen Keating  
Community Sign Language Interpreter  
BA, ITP, RID CI & CT

Licensed in WI and IL  
116 Pearl Street

Sharon, WI 53585  
(262) 725-4685

27 Nov 2017

Assembly Committee on Jobs

Senate Committee on Licensing Reform

To whom it may concern,

My name is Jessica Alter, I am a Sign Language Interpreter from Madison, Wisconsin. I have been negatively impacted by our current state law for sign language interpreters. I graduated from Milwaukee Area Technical College in 2011 and have been working as an interpreter in Madison for six years. I work primarily in a K-12 educational setting and do some video relay interpreting for supplemental income. At the time of my college graduation I obtained my license through Wisconsin's Department of Regulation and Licensing. I held that license, in addition to a DPI license, for two years. While holding the DRL (now DSPS) license I was able to provide interpreting services outside of the school setting. This allowed me to interpret meetings that came up with parents, to interpret for my districts community recreation entity, and to pursue freelance work on my own time. Unfortunately, after my first license cycle ended I made the decision not to renew. This decision was made due to the time limit of the restricted license. By "suspending" it myself, I would be able to hold on to the other renewal cycles as to not be stuck in the future. Though I am still holding onto those additional cycles, the time limit remains. The new proposed law, AB589/SB465, would resolve this issue. As an interpreter who met the requirements previously, I feel that I could obtain new proposed yellow license as well. Obtaining the yellow license would allow me to work in a variety of low risk settings indefinitely, meeting my need for employment while meeting the needs of your Deaf, hard of hearing, deaf-blind, and hearing constituents.

Please do vote YES on AB589/SB465. It's important for job growth and it's important for safety.

Thank you,

Jessica Alter



Hello members of The Assembly Committee on Jobs and the Economy,

My name is Andrew Damon and I currently live in Shorewood, WI but am originally from Madison's East side. I urge you to support AB589 which is the Sign Language Interpreter Licensure Bill. This bill is important to Deaf, Hard of Hearing, Deafblind, Sign Language Interpreters and various stakeholders in our state. The bill will provide much needed protection for consumers by including better enforcement and oversight of Sign Language Interpreters. In addition, it includes reasonable requirements for service providers that will ensure employment opportunities while maintaining high quality standards for consumers.

Due to changes in certification offerings on a national level, we need to ensure that interpreters have additional options to verify their qualifications to work in this profession. The proposed bill includes additional alternatives for certification, which is a minimum requirement that provides protections to the consumers we serve. AB589 will eliminate the restricted six-year terminal license and replace it with an indefinite license as long as certification and continuing education requirements are met. This will allow professionals to continue working and provide a larger pool of service providers to meet the many needs of consumers while striving for the National Interpreting Certification (NIC) through the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID).

AB589 includes a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Department of Safety and Professional Services (DSPS) and the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) to bring clarity and agreement regarding the scope of work in K-12 settings and community settings. This bill proposes to establish an examining board that is comprised with a majority of consumers. Under the current law, the enforcement mechanisms are weak and have minimal impact on the oversight of ethical practices. The proposed board will be authorized to monitor and enforce the law and ensure safeguards are in place so that an already marginalized community is not further taken advantage of and suffer at the hands of unqualified and unethical practitioners.

I have spent the last 6 years studying Sign Language Interpreting at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and with this current law with the license through The Department of Safety and Professional Services after graduation I would only have five years to obtain my NIC through RID. Unfortunately the test was outdated and has a pass rate of 15% - 20%. Which means after the five years with a restricted license I would no longer be able to interpret,

currently about 20% of the interpreters in the state lost their license as of August 1st. Currently the State of Wisconsin relies on out-of-state interpreters to fill those gaps, some of which are not licensed in Wisconsin. This reliance on out-of-state interpreters will only increase as strain on the current workforce of Sign Language Interpreters in Wisconsin becomes worse. With AB589 I would be able to take an alternate test that is proven to be a better test of knowledge and skill to serve the Deaf community as well as the hearing community I serve.

It is my hope you seriously consider the points presented to you and offer your support to AB589, the Sign Language Interpreter Licensure Bill. AB589 will lessen some of the restrictions and barriers to employment while balancing the needs of consumers to have high quality service providers.

Sincerely,

Andrew Damon

November 29, 2017

Representative Mike Kuglitsch  
Room 220 North  
State Capitol  
PO Box 8952  
Madison, WI 53708

RE: AB 589/ SB 465-Support the Sign Language Interpreter Licensure Bill

Dear Representative Kuglitsch, Neylon and Brostoff,

My name is Athena Cifax and I am a current resident of Milwaukee. As a constituent in your district, I want you to support AB 589/SB 465, which is the Sign Language Interpreter Licensure Bill. This bill is important to deaf, hard of hearing, deafblind, sign language interpreters and various stakeholders in our state. The bill will provide much needed protections for consumers by including better enforcement and oversight of sign language interpreters. In addition, it includes reasonable requirements for service providers that will ensure employment opportunities while maintaining high quality standards for consumers.

I am a freelance interpreter for a sign language interpreting agency in Wisconsin, have interpreted within the community for the past four years as a restricted licensed interpreter, and have stayed active within the community serving in a variety of settings.

Due to changes in certification offerings on a national level, we need to ensure that interpreters have additional options to verify their qualifications to work in this profession. The proposed bill includes additional alternatives for certification, which is a minimum requirement that provides protections to the consumers we serve. AB 589/ SB 465 will eliminate the restricted six-year terminal license and replace it with an indefinite license if certification and continuing education requirements are met. This will allow professionals to continue working and provide a larger pool of service providers to meet the many needs of consumers. AB 589/SB 465 includes a MOU between the Department of Safety and Professional Services and the Department of Public Instruction to bring clarity and agreement regarding the scope of work in K-12 settings and community settings. This bill proposes to establish an examining board that is comprised with most consumers. Under the current law, the enforcement mechanisms are weak and have minimal impact on the oversight of ethical practices. The proposed board will be authorized to monitor and enforce the law and ensure safeguards are in place so that an already marginalized community is not further taken advantage of and suffer at the hands of unqualified and unethical practitioners.

The proposed bill will help to ensure that those, like myself, who have a current time constraint of a six-year limit on current license to continue with employment as we adapt to changes impacted by our national organization. Bill AB 589/SB 465 will help to ensure that interpreters

are being placed in appropriate settings based off their skill qualification level to help ensure the safety of the deaf community that we serve.

It is my hope you seriously consider the points presented to you and offer your support to AB 589/ SB 465, the Sign Language Interpreter Licensure Bill. The bill will lessen some of the restrictions and barriers to employment while balancing the needs of consumers to have high quality service providers. Please acknowledge your support of this bill.

Sincerely,

Athena Cifax  
8801 W. Oklahoma Ave Apt #303  
Milwaukee, WI 53227  
atgrice@yahoo.com

November 22, 2017

Dear Representative Neylon and Respective Assembly Committee,

My name is Jodie Nigro. I am a Sign language Interpreter in the State of Wisconsin. Please support the AB598/SB465. An Act to repeal 15.407 (9) and 440.032; to amend 440.032 (3) (b) 3. and 905.015 (2) (intro.); and to create 15.405 (18) and chapter 471 of the statutes; Relating to: regulation of sign language interpretation services, providing an exemption from emergency rule procedures, granting rule-making authority, and providing a criminal penalty.

I am a resident of Union Grove, Wisconsin, and I have been an interpreter in this state approximately six years, and as of August 31, 2017 my working title as an ASL Interpreter was stripped away from me and many other interpreters who were unable to pass national certification testing required by the current license Wisconsin §440.032 without any alternative. The national certification testing organization, RID –Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, has gone through a moratorium and testing restructure, and as of 2012 went from a 46% pass rate to 17% pass rate nationwide. The current license puts many professional working interpreters at risk of losing their livelihood and puts the Deaf and Hard of Hearing consumers at risk of losing equality access, and quality interpreters to provide for their communication needs.

I have done everything that I am supposed to do. I graduated and gained my ASL Interpreter Degree from an accredited college, I have taken the DSPS required state test – WITA, Wisconsin Interpreter and Transliterating Assessment, and have passed both times, I have hired mentors (both hearing and Deaf). However, I feel that the current state license relies on an organization, RID – Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, which has proven that their testing validity is questionable at best – and has no oversight to monitor or correct instabilities within their own organization to ensure that the testing is fairly assessed. This organization that is supposed to be membership driven – however does not support their membership and leaves their members, who are up and coming, to flounder without any support in gaining the ability to pass the tests. This has greatly affected me and my family's livelihood. Not only can I not interpret (ie. work in my profession) until I pass the RID National Interpreter Certification test, which I have taken four times, and just paid for the fifth, but each test costs about \$450.

I believe the new bill LRB-4250, is a collaborative effort designed to protect all stakeholders involved: the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, the Deaf-Blind, Hearing community, and professional Deaf and Hearing Interpreters. Having a minimum standard of qualifications means no miscommunication between me and anyone in those environments. This bill also will ensure all interpreters are licensed and can face consequences if an interpreter does not have a license or is unethical. This will ensure that interpreters are meeting the needs of the consumers and protecting the consumers in their most vulnerable moments.

I ask that you please support the AB598/SB465. Support your constituents in the State of Wisconsin. Thank you for taking the time to read my plea.

Respectfully,  
Jodie Nigro  
262-492-7613

Mr. Neylon,

I'm writing to express my concern about the proposed sign language interpreter license bill. This bill does not increase qualified interpreters and does not address the ready to work gap that interpreters are facing in the field.

I have been a nationally certified interpreter since 2008. It took many years of practice, training, professional development and mentoring for me to be where I am today. By decreasing the standard for interpreters this will only hinder the profession and decrease access to qualified interpreters in the community.

Thank you for taking my position into consideration.

-Carly Bieri

Sent from my iPhone

Dear Representative Neylon,

I've been viewing the legislative hearing for Sign Language Interpreter proposal remotely because I feel that as a practicing interpreter I cannot speak my opposition to the proposal publicly as this is my livelihood and the individuals there, that support this proposal, are my peers. There are many interpreters that feel the same way that I do which is why there were no individuals there in opposition of this proposal.

I graduated UW-Milwaukee in 2011 and since that time have worked towards national certification; taken the national exam 4 times before passing. At that time, there was no alternative test to take so I was limited in what I could do to get my renewable license. Now, however, students and interpreters with their restricted license have another option - The Board for Evaluation of Interpreters (BEI). This assessment stood in court and is a valid assessment which means working professionals have another option other than the "unreliable" national exam. We should not lower our minimum standards because of the fact that these individuals cannot pass an assessment.

I am not comfortable with a licensing system that allows for basic certification to continue to work indefinitely. There is no incentive for interpreters to advance their skills which was the problem before our current licensure (Wisconsin Act 360) was passed. If this proposal passes I feel this profession will regress in terms of morale and quality.

We need to address the ready-to-work gap but licensure change is not the answer. I ask that you say no to this proposal.

Thank you for your time.

Chantel Wiedmeyer

# disabilityrights | WISCONSIN

Protection and advocacy for people with disabilities.

To: Representative Adam Neylon, Chair, Assembly Committee on Jobs and the Economy  
Members of the Assembly Committee on Jobs and the Economy

From: Disability Rights Wisconsin

Date: November 30, 2017

Re: Testimony in Support of 2017 AB 589

Thank you Representative Neylon and members of the Committee for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of Assembly Bill 589 relating to regulation of sign language interpretation services. Disability Rights Wisconsin (DRW) is the designated Protection and Advocacy system for Wisconsinites with disabilities. DRW is charged with protecting and enforcing the legal rights of individuals with disabilities, investigating systemic abuse and neglect, and ensuring access to supports and services, so that all Wisconsinites can learn, work, and live full lives in our communities free of abuse, neglect, and discrimination.

We are pleased to support AB 589 because it has the potential to benefit Wisconsinites who are deaf and hard of hearing, by supporting access to qualified interpreters and providing more effective oversight. The proposal is based on significant community input coordinated by a Sign Language Interpreter Task Force convened by Wisconsin Association for the Deaf (WAD) and the Wisconsin Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (WisRID). The Task Force used multiple approaches to solicit stakeholder input, including online surveys, community meetings, and meetings with partners. This is a very complex and specialized issue, and we commend the significant effort that has been put forth to be responsive to community needs.

Some of the positive aspects of the bill include the following:

- ASL interpreters are required to perform very specialized and highly skilled work in their role of accurately conveying information that may be very sensitive and complex. This includes legal, mental health, and medical settings. The proposed legislation will protect consumers by requiring an advanced level of skill for those who work in these specialized settings to ensure they have the training needed to accurately convey very sensitive and technical information.
- The proposed Sign Language Interpreters Examining Board will provide a framework for more effective enforcement and follow-up on complaints, as well as protection for consumers from fraud, by more effectively addressing concerns about unlicensed practice of interpreting in Wisconsin. The Examining Board will benefit from participation by consumers and professionals. Having a robust consumer board will provide strong consumer protection, greater independence, and a reduction in concerns on conflicts of interest.
- DRW has heard significant concerns from deaf individuals about access to mental health services and the challenges that can result when a practitioner uses unlicensed interpreters or those without

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800 928-8778 consumers & family



specialized training. The new requirement for advanced training for those who interpret in a mental health setting has the potential to improve the quality of communication and support better outcomes for the consumer.

Thank you for your consideration of our comments supporting this proposal. In recent years DRW has heard from many deaf Wisconsinites about the difficulties they experience in accessing services. AB589 is a positive effort to begin to address these barriers. We look forward to working with policy makers on additional opportunities to increase access, including increasing the number of mental health services providers who have the ability to communicate directly with the deaf and individuals who are hard of hearing, and who are familiar with deaf culture.

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**Testimony on AB 589: Assembly Committee on Jobs and the Economy  
Shel Gross, Director of Public Policy  
November 30, 2017**

I don't know whether any of you keep your closed captioning on when watching a show that is in English. It is amazing the degree to which the captioning does not reflect what is actually being said. It makes me wonder what the consequences would be if I had to rely on the captioning alone to understand what was going on. This does not even begin to capture the challenges of sign language interpretation. Captioning is transcribing words. But American Sign Language (ASL) does not just transcribe English words into signs. It is a different communication system. So interpreters need to be able to "translate" English words into comparable signs and concepts within ASL. This requires a significant degree of proficiency even for what we might consider the mundane aspects of our daily lives, like testifying at a hearing. Imagine the challenges created when "translating" significant emotional issues, trying to talk about trauma histories and addressing interpersonal conflict. MHA supports AB589 because we believe it provides a framework that ensures a high standard of training and certification for interpreters who work in mental health settings.

Through my work at Mental Health America of Wisconsin (MHA) I have had the privilege of working with the Deaf Community on a variety of projects. I was part of a steering committee organized through the Department of Health Services to develop a plan for addressing the needs of Deaf and Hard of Hearing (D/HOH) individuals who have mental health and substance use treatment needs. Through this process I came to understand the significant deficits in access to culturally-appropriate and communication-accessible mental health services. Later, through our suicide prevention work I came to understand more about the degree to which the isolation of the Deaf community can contribute to mental health concerns, not just in terms of access to mental health services but access to connections in our communities that many of us take for granted. I also learned about the challenges in communicating across the gaps that currently exist. Additionally through our involvement with the Wisconsin Council on Mental Health, MHA has been working to increase access opportunities for individuals who are D/HOH who have mental health and substance use treatment needs. We have a lot of work to do in this area. AB 589 is an important first step.

Despite the level of engagement I have enjoyed with the Deaf community I don't pretend to have mastery over all the issues involved in this legislation. I have relied on credible organizations within the Deaf Community to educate me on the issues and the options offered; this is consistent with the value that MHA places on turning to the voice of lived experience for identification of and solutions to problems in our mental health system. Those organizations—the Wisconsin Association for the Deaf and the Wisconsin Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf—have based their recommendations on input from stakeholders within the Deaf Community. Should there be concerns about the specifics identified in the bill I will be happy to engage with interested parties to explore how to improve the legislation. But it is critical to address the need for a licensing system that will assure high quality interpretation services in sensitive areas and that provides for accountability for all involved.

Thank you for your consideration.

[www.mhawisconsin.org](http://www.mhawisconsin.org)

Hello, my name is Michael Maffucci and I hold a Certified Deaf Interpreter (CDI) and Conditional Legal Interpreting Permit-Relay (CLIP-R) under The Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf. I have been in this field for 10 years. As a Deaf individual, I represent for the Deaf Community and also as an interpreter, I also represent for the interpreter community. For the best of the best, I represent both communities. CDIs are persons who you should pay attention to the most.

This is my opportunity to educate you what CDIs (Certified Deaf Interpreter) roles are in the interpreting field. We are highly skilled interpreters who specialize in communication. The signed form of communications in the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community come in many different approaches, from varies of communication systems ranging from and to fluency in America Sign Language. We also work with people with cognitive challenges, Deaf-Blind, physical disabilities, foreign sign language and much more. CDIs have the ability to modify to meet their needs opposite to hearing interpreters.

To become a CDI, you must be Deaf and a native language user (ASL), and have Cultural and Linguistic knowledge, and being part of both the Deaf community as well as the hearing community.

When RID declared a moratorium on their testing including the CDI test, it took a toll on the Deaf individuals who have goals to become interpreters, and not only in Wisconsin but nationwide. Today, we do not have ANY national level test available for Deaf Interpreters. This lead us to form a Deaf Interpreter Task-Force to discuss and create a solution.

We, Deaf Interpreters decided to go separate ways from RID's certification requirement and create our own criteria. We pointed out our requirements that covers everything you need to know in order to become an qualified interpreter without taking RID's test. The Deaf Interpreter community lost their creditable towards RID's testing because the passing rate for Deaf is only 27 percent on the Certified Deaf Interpreter Knowledge Exam. There are only 222 CDIs nationwide. Out of 222, only 47 hold CLIP-R (legal certification) and Wisconsin has 5 CDIs and only one CDI works full time. This AB589 bill will allow the ability to expand opportunities for Deaf individuals to become qualified interpreters.

Did you know that the CEO of the National Association of the Deaf (NAD) announced the nationwide unemployment rate for Deaf and Hard of Hearing is between 70-80 percent? Did you realize that Wisconsin is considered one of the worst state for Deaf and Hard of Hearing people to live in because we lack

Richard Myhre  
Milwaukee, WI 53211

Hello, My name is Richard Myhre and I live in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. I am an interpreting training program student at the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee. I am a CODA, which means I am a child of a Deaf adult. Growing up with a Deaf mother I have witnessed, first-hand, the struggles the Deaf community faces because of the current law. Today I would like to share with you a personal experience I had. My mother had a doctor appointment and requested an interpreter and when the time came, there was no interpreter present. At the fragile age of 11 I felt obligated to help my mother and interpret in this situation I want take a second and have you visualize, being 11 years old and having that much responsibility on your shoulders. I did not have any of the necessary skills and the communication was lost. Luckily for my mother this appointment was not life or death, but this was not fair for my mother or myself. The bill presented to you today, AB589, has a key aspect, a sign language examining board. This board will insure interpreters are liable for their actions and will have penalties to prevent unqualified people from interpreting. At the time, it was assumed I could interpret because I am a CODA. To be clear, just because someone knows American Sign Language does not mean they are able to interpret. There are many skills, techniques, and rules used in interpreting that I had never been exposed to. In hindsight, I still do not feel that I would be qualified to interpret in that situation and I am a student with much more experience under my belt. This board can aid in situations like mine and help to ensure situations like this do not happen. I do not know who was at fault for not providing the requested interpreter, but the board would protect Deaf consumers, like my mother, and would have had the ability to penalize whoever was responsible. Situations like this were not uncommon in my upbringing, and many other CODAs can relate to my experience. Today I ask you to make this bill a law so this vicious cycle can stop. Thank you.

Hello:

My name is Jessica Ryback. I am a sign language interpreting student at the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee. I am testifying in support of Assembly Bill 589. I support this bill because it creates job opportunities for interpreting while still maintaining high standards in our field. When I graduate this Spring, I will only have 5 years to pass my national certification test to be able to continue to working as an interpreter. Even though the passing rate for this exam is only 30%. This new bill would end this short window of time new interpreters have to obtain their national certification. I, along with other future interpreters, will still be working towards becoming nationally certified we just want the opportunity to continue to grow as interpreters and not have our futures dictated by this time restriction. Currently, in our state we have an interpreter shortage while we are continuing to lose newer interpreters due to this time restriction. All the while, we are hindering other people from joining our field because of this uncertain future we are faced with. This downward trend is frightening for our field and for the deaf community because of the lack of access to interpreters that results from it.

Another reason I support this bill is because there will be a board to monitor the quality of interpreters to maintain high standards in our field and allow consumers to file complaints if necessary. In this way, we are actually providing more quality control in our field than we currently have. All in all, by supporting this bill you are supporting breaking down barriers to the workforce that currently exist in our field and allowing us to have a future as interpreters. As a student, I have spent thousands of dollars on my education and countless hours working in the deaf community to hone my interpreting skills and just want the opportunity to continue working until I can see the fruits of my labor. Thank you for your time !

Sincerely,  
Jessica Ryback

Jessica Ryback

DESTRAMPE p.1

My name is Christina Destrampe and I am the president of Wisconsin Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (WisRID). We are a non-profit organization of approximately 170 members located around the state of Wisconsin. It is our mission to further the profession of sign language interpreting. For those who are unaware, sign language interpreting makes communication possible between people who are deaf, hard of hearing, or deafblind and people who can hear. Interpreting is a complex process that requires a high degree of linguistic, cognitive, and technical skills in both English and American Sign Language (ASL). Sign language interpreting, like spoken language interpreting, involves more than simply replacing a word of spoken English with a signed representation of that English word. ASL has its own grammatical rules, sentence structure and cultural nuances. Interpreters must thoroughly understand the subject matter in which they work so that they are able to convert information from one language into another. Interpreters provide services wherever a deaf or hard of hearing person needs to communicate with people who can hear but cannot sign fluently for themselves; such as in educational, medical, theatrical, and legal settings; for conferences and conventions, at corporations and institutions or even within the government like this public hearing today. Interpreters may also work as video relay interpreters, where deaf or hard of hearing individuals use an interpreter to communicate with anyone in the world over the telephone by the use of a webcam or video phone. As you can see, the work of an interpreter is complex and requires a great deal of expertise in order to provide a quality interpretation satisfactory to both parties.

In Wisconsin, we currently have a permanent and restricted license through the Department of Safety and Professional Services that is required when providing sign language interpreting services for compensation. There are only but a few exemptions including those who already possess a license under the Department of Public Instruction as educational interpreters. Currently there are a number of weaknesses within the current license including the lack of enforcement against unethical practitioners, no formal agreement between the Department of Public Instruction and the Department of Safety and Professional Services, inconsistencies with the national certification exam, and the barriers for Deaf interpreters.

I would like to touch specifically on the inconsistencies with the national certification exam. Our profession utilizes the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf's national certification exam. When Wisconsin Act 360 was passed, the pass rate for the exam was 77%. In the time since the enactment of our initial licensure law, RID discovered fraudulent activity in the processing of the certification exam and has also updated the format. The pass rate has since fallen to 20%. In 2015, RID issued a suspension on all certifications and testing opportunities, which lasted almost a year. DSPS has begun to recognize another certification based on a tiered system; however, as this is a recent development, individuals have not received the time needed to prepare for this exam. Under our current licensure, individuals who are not yet certified are placed in the restricted license and are only allowed two renewals. With the pass rate being so low, the moratorium on certification, and availability of alternative certifications being limited, individuals are struggling to meet the deadline in order to achieve the requirement of certification for the permanent license. As of September 1st, 10% of licensed interpreters who are residents in the state were unable to renew their restricted license since they had exhausted

the number of renewals. We lost 10% of our workforce because our current licensure law was not prepared for the changes that have transpired in the interpreting field and we need a licensure with built in protections for all consumers to obtain effective services as well as qualified interpreters to maintain their right to work. AB-589 will protect consumers by limiting the settings in which individuals can work, but will not have a time limit. This will increase the workforce of interpreters in the state while also protecting both deaf and non-deaf consumers who require our services.

As I stated before, there are other weaknesses that AB-589 will address. There is not enough time allotted for me to discuss these in depth, but I can guarantee you that the changes to licensure are a necessary part of ensuring that we are creating more job opportunities while protecting citizens from fraudulent or unethical individuals. I encourage you to listen carefully to the other testimonies today on how licensure is affecting your constituents.

On behalf of our entire organization, I would like to thank you for your time and ask for your support AB-589.

THOMM 1

Jon Thomm  
1485 N Farwell Ave  
Apt W  
Milwaukee, WI 53202

Assembly Committee on Jobs and Economy  
Representative Adam Neylon (Chair)  
RE: AB 589/SB 465 Support the Sign Language Interpreter Licensure Bill  
Dear Honorable Chair and Committee Members:

My name is Jonathan Thomm, I'm a sign language interpreter in the state of Wisconsin and the current Vice President for the Wisconsin Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (WisRID). I am here to ask for your support of AB 589.

First, I would like to acknowledge all the people that are here both for and against this bill. I feel safe in saying that this should show the Committee that interpreters care about the profession, and the population that we serve. Additionally, I would like to acknowledge our Deaf community members that have joined us today. This is strong proof that the community we serve wants to be involved in decisions that impact their access to the world around them.

Currently, there are only a few stakeholders who are concerned over the lack of an established time limit for interpreters to move up in their certification process. The concern is that by not having a timeline to prove advanced interpreting skillsets through national certification, it will encourage interpreters to become complacent and stop skill building. The bill authors recognized this concern along with the need to balance the ever-growing gap between graduation and national certification. The trade-off was to limit the lower tier license by not including medical, legal, and mental health settings along with opening opportunities for mentoring (such as team interpreting in medical settings with advanced-licensed interpreters). This law doesn't stop any company from requiring NIC / BEI Advanced, which will still help motivate people to



THOMM &

get a higher certification. And CEUs are still required for the BEI Basic, so workshops are still required.

Why is this better economically for the interpreting profession? Under the current law, interpreters are granted a "restricted license" and allowed up to six years to become nationally certified which is required to obtain a permanent DSPS license. If the interpreter does not obtain the national certification, the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf's National Interpreter Certification, they are no longer allowed to renew their DSPS license and must stop working for compensation. Removing the time restriction helps the interpreting economy become more marketable and attractive to sign language interpreters while maintaining consumer protections in high risk settings.

One of the issues with this time limit is that our current license primarily relies on the RID NIC, which has proven to be unreliable and unstable as a testing system. When our first licensure law was being developed, the pass rate for the NIC was about 77%. One could be expected that after graduating from an interpreter training program along with 2-3 years of working as a full time interpreter you could obtain national certification. Due to changes in the testing system, the pass rate has since fallen to 19%. Furthermore, there was a recent moratorium, or suspension, on the NIC for over a year. This time lost wasn't given back to Wisconsin interpreters, who had a maximum of 6 years, that still needed to pass the NIC to obtain a permanent license. In the meantime, Wisconsin started looking for a viable alternative exam, and decided to join other states by accepting the BEI-Advanced as equivalent to the NIC. The BEI has been proven to be a neutral third party test that measures interpreters' skills with impeccable inter-rater reliability.

Having taken both the NIC and BEI-Advanced tests I can testify that they each have their own set of challenges, but in my opinion the BEI is assessed more fairly, and they are very transparent about what is expected from a certified interpreter. They provide example rubrics to test takers and the rating process is also very efficient and has been valid. I, and many others, have experienced discrepancies in the NIC scoring that borders negligence by RID. When test takers confront or send inquiries to RID and its testing subsidiary concerning results, the test taker is brushed off and told one thing: "appeals will not be considered on the basis of rater judgement." There are those who are naysayers in acceptance of the BEI, however it has been proven as equivalent to the NIC at the BIE Advanced level, therefore it has been accepted by DSPS already

How does this impact the workforce? Since my graduating class in 2011, six years ago now, there have only been approximately 6 people from the state of Wisconsin that have passed the NIC. In the past year alone, already 2 have passed the BEI-Advanced certification. Putting that into perspective, Wisconsin has had approximately 100 people graduate from interpreter training programs since 2011. Due to the ambiguous time restriction, the current law is pushing people unnecessarily out of the profession. We've already lost 10% of our in-state workforce in September. Unless something is done to change the timeline, that number will rise every two years as time runs out on the restricted licenses.

WisRID and WAD have done their fair share of gathering evidence and feedback from stakeholders. From the small pool of stakeholders who oppose this bill, some comments were

THOMM 4

made that this provision only caters to novice interpreters and does not focus on what is best for the Deaf/Hard of Hearing/Deafblind community. I think that is an unfortunate lens to view this situation through. There are many interpreters, myself included, that have improved immensely over the last 6 years. I've even come within 5 points of passing the BEI Advanced. But we haven't made it yet. The field lost around 28 interpreters in September. That's 28 people that couldn't continue serving the community. 28 people that had the minimum credential at the time and then overnight were deemed ineligible. Our skills didn't magically disappear. But our availability did. Imagine how many appointments went unfilled as a result of having that many people immediately unavailable. Is THAT what is best for the Deaf community?

Please support AB 589 and invest in both growing the sign language interpreting profession as well as strengthening protections for deaf, hard of hearing, and deafblind consumers through the establishment of the Sign Language Interpreter Examining Board. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Jonathan Thomm

Brandon Radke  
2727a N. Pierce St.  
Milwaukee, WI 53212

Hello. My name is Brandon Radke and I am an Interpreter Training Program student at the University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee. The current law for the state of Wisconsin regarding licensure for interpreters, could have a potential negative effects on mine and my colleges' futures. Some main issues with the current law include, but are not limited to, national licensure passing rates and providing quality interpreting.

According to the Center for the Assessment of American Sign Language, the current pass rate for the National Interpreter Certification is approximately 30% when past years have yielded up to 84% of interpreters nationally (2014); out of our cohort of 12, this means only 2 or 3 of us will get our national certification and the rest of us will no longer be able to practice in the community here in Wisconsin. This is concerning to me due to the six year limit put on the temporary license and with the current national passing rate, I am concerned that I will not get my national license. Compared to other fields, for example nursing, the National Council of State Boards of Nursing shows that the national passing rate for nursing is approximately 70% (2017). Also, touching on costs of national testing, if a student were to take this test every 6 months as the test allows, it would result in a spending of over \$4,000, and that is without even seeking professional development or workshops (2016); as a college student with over \$50,000 in debt, these statistics are daunting. As a result of this dilemma, I have recently considered moving out of the state that I have grown up in, so I can work and make a living.

Another huge consequence with the current law, is that it fosters unrestricted settings. Laws made for interpreters give the power to the Deaf community keeping the qualified in the field, and the unqualified out. With the current licensure, a recent college graduate can go into a hospital setting when our most qualified interpreters should be in those potential life or death situations. If we do not have restrictions on settings, we get people that are unqualified and are harmful to the Deaf community; we need a system that provides a checks and balances.

This current bill will take away the limit on the temporary license and also add restriction with a review board. A concern with taking away this limit is that people won't pursue the national license but I assure you, the people I observe and the people in my cohort are some of the most motivated and hard working people I have met with the best intentions toward this community. Our Code of Professional Conduct requires all professions in this field to pursue professional development and continuing education. Here in Wisconsin, we want to make sure our Deaf community has power and accessibility. If this new bill does not pass, the resulting consequences will result in a shortage of interpreters and therefore, a shortage on access; for these reasons, I am for this bill.

RADKE, P. 2

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PAMELA SUE CONINE

Dear Honorable Representatives on the Committee:

I am the program coordinator of an interpreter education program at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, daughter of Deaf parents, stepmother to a hard of hearing daughter, community interpreter for almost 20 years, and I serve the community in a variety of capacities including the board liaison for the Wisconsin Association of the Deaf (WAD) and the Wisconsin Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (WisRID). My national service includes serving as the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) Supersite Coordinator for the national exam for over 10 years. I was the chair of the Sign Language Interpreter Task Force (SLIT) that was given the charge to review the current law, identify areas of concern, which included several community forums and surveys and then come up with recommendations. Following the recommendations of the taskforce, I was asked to serve as the co-chair for the WAD/WisRID Legislative Committee and serve on the licensure subcommittee whose responsibility was to take the recommendations of the SLIT and draft a bill. I bring multiple perspectives and insights regarding the need to maintain and improve the license for sign language interpreters.

I want you to support AB589, which is the Sign Language Interpreter Licensure Bill. This bill is important to the Deaf community, sign language interpreters and various stakeholders in our state. The bill will provide much needed protections for consumers by including better enforcement and oversight of sign language interpreters. In addition, it includes reasonable requirements for service providers that will ensure employment opportunities while maintaining high quality standards for consumers.

Due to changes and a moratorium in certification offerings on a national level, we need to ensure that interpreters have additional options to verify their qualifications to work in this profession. The proposed bill includes additional alternatives for certification, which is a minimum requirement that provides protections to the consumers we serve. AB589 will eliminate the restricted six-year terminal license and replace it with an indefinite license as long as certification and continuing education requirements are met. This will allow professionals to continue working and provide a larger pool of service providers to meet the many needs of consumers. As a coordinator of an interpreter training program, I have serious concerns about an interpreter shortage that has already begun since this year marks the first wave of interpreters that would risk losing their license by not achieving national certification. As the former Supersite Coordinator for the RID national exam, I was responsible for coordinating and proctoring the national exam and tested individuals throughout the Midwest. In addition to coordinator role, I provided skill development workshops to prepare individuals for national certification. The amount of blood, sweat and tears I witnessed in these trainings clearly indicated to me the commitment and dedication these interpreters had, even after multiple trainings and test-taking, they could not pass the national exam. Unfortunately, the current pass rate over the past few years hovers between 20-25%. That is an extremely high bar for anyone to pass and as a result, we are going to lose some good interpreters. The addition of the BEI exam is a great option due to its validity and interrater reliability, but that too is a challenging test. It is my professional opinion that someone who passes the BEI Basic performance exam, which allows a person to work with a yellow/intermediate license, has a level of competency and knowledge to maintain employment as interpreter in certain settings.

My other concern is that once students graduate from our program, they will feel no other choice but to relocate to another state that allows to them work without the fear of losing their ability to maintain employment. Our program is rigorous and students who graduate from the program have a solid foundation moving into the professional realm. I have difficulty telling students who spent five-six years of their lives studying and training to become interpreters, who also have spent a fortune on their college education, that after five or six years, they may be unable to work. On top of that, I have to explain to them that after they graduate, they will be expected to pass a national exam that, due to things out of our control, will often require multiple retakes and multiple trainings and these new interpreters will have to bear the cost to complete all of it. Graduates are hit with school loans and then it is compounded by the additional pressure and expense to take a test that has the entire country frustrated with the results.

I am 100% in support of high standards and quality when it comes to interpreters. AB589 will lessen the barriers and restrictions to employment while putting in safeguards to protect consumers from unethical practitioners. This bill proposes to establish an examining board that is comprised with a majority of consumers. Under the current law, the enforcement mechanisms are weak and have minimal impact on the oversight of ethical practices. The proposed board will be authorized to monitor and enforce the law so that an already marginalized community is not further taken

advantage of and suffer at the hands of unqualified and unethical practitioners. The board provides the balance to removing the six-year restriction for interpreters.

It is my hope you seriously consider the points presented to you and offer your support to AB589, the Sign Language Interpreter Licensure Bill.

Sincerely,

Pamela Sue Conine  
W319 S9145 Lauren's Parkway  
Mukwonago, WI 53149  
414-803-1925  
pmsconine@gmail.com

Hello, my name is Tammy Muraszewski and I am currently in the Interpreting Training Program at the University of Wisconsin- Milwaukee, and I am writing this to testify my support for Assembly Bill 589. As of right now, with how the current bill stands, there is a required five years after we graduate that we must take the National Certification Exam. After only five years of graduating, we are expected to have all the knowledge and skill it takes to pass a National Exam to be able to get our certification. If this bill were to pass, interpreters wouldn't have to worry about passing an exam that we know we are not ready for five years after graduation. We would be able to extend the time that we are learning out in the field, and be able to apply more of what we know to the exam. As of right now, the exam has a passing rate of 20%, which means that there is only 20% of interpreters working throughout the state. If this keeps going on, we will be subjected to an interpreter shortage. There are some very experienced, seasoned professionals that are not passing this exam, and are losing their pre-certified license because their time to take the test and pass, ran out. So, those interpreters lost everything they had worked so hard for. After their time- period is done, they will lose their pre-certification and must go through the entire schooling process once again. I know I can speak for myself, as well as my other classmates and interpreters that are here today when I say that I have paid my due in the Interpreter program to get to where I am today. It would be nice to know that after I graduate, I would be able to get more experience under my belt before I take a test that would make me nationally certified. Even if there is no time limit when it comes to taking the National Certification Exam, every interpreter still wants to reach the nationally certified stage. With this new change, we would feel more polished and ready to take the exam, instead of feeling rushed due to the time frame we are given. As interpreters, our goal is to provide quality services to the people in Wisconsin, and feel we can't do that if we know there is a time-limit on our services nearing. In regards to this information, I hope we can count on you to support the passing of Assembly Bill 589. Thank you.



Sara Kay Gengler  
230 Mill St.  
Little Chute, WI 54140

Hello, My name is Sara Kay Gengler. I am an American Sign Language interpreting student at the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee but currently reside in Little Chute Wisconsin. I have lived in the great state of Wisconsin my entire life and currently face the saddening fact that I may have to move out of state to seek employment because of the current law here in Wisconsin. Currently, upon graduation I will have 6 years to obtain a national certification, in normal circumstances this does not seem like a daunting fact, however according to the numbers, the current pass rate of the national certification exam, named the NIC performance exam is 20%, meaning out of my graduating class only two or three of us will be able to interpret in the state of Wisconsin. To put this in perspective from where I stand as a student, the unrealistic expectation to pass the NIC performance exam will not be because I have not studied, it will not be because I do not have the skills needed, it will not be because I have not practiced enough or had enough time in the field. It will be because currently the test is unreliable and an unrealistic standard. To get into this program I was required to pass an extensive screening process and currently are required many hours practicing in the field, on top of my time in the classroom. The money I have gave to my education is priceless compared to the bonds I have made with the great Deaf community here in Wisconsin, however graduating with thousands of dollars in student debt and then being expected to pay to take an unreliable test multiple times, along with paying to go to workshops and other experiences to further my education in-between failing the test is not realistic and pushes me to start picturing a future in a different state away from my family and the local Deaf community I have immersed myself in. I can assure you that my peers have this same fear and also have begun the thoughts of seeking employment out of state. In result, there will be a possible interpreter shortage in Wisconsin since UW-Milwaukee is the only four-year interpreter training program where a student can obtain an ASL interpreting bachelor's degree in the state of Wisconsin. I love Wisconsin, the Deaf community here, and being close to my family. Wisconsin is my home. For this reason I urge to vote in affirmation of AB589 to remove the barriers of employment and open doors for my peers and I, not only to keep us in Wisconsin, but also to help us work in the field we are passionate about and have invested so much in.

Audrey Navine

2429 N Oakland, Ave

Milwaukee WI 53211

Hello,

My name is Audrey Navine and I live in Milwaukee, Wi. I am currently an Interpreting Training Program student at UW-Milwaukee, and if the bill is not passed I plan to leave Wisconsin. I have invested time, energy, money and passion into a field that is incredibly uncertain here in Wisconsin. I have friends in different majors, such as nursing and education who worry about testing, but the difference is the test their professions require are reliable and ethical. Not only is their testing a realistic expectation but they do not have to worry about their futures here in Wisconsin. Honestly, I find myself a bit jealous! It is very disheartening to invest too much money into my education, workshops, and other opportunities to have to move away from the only home I've ever known. I want to be involved with and work in the Wisconsin Deaf community because it is the community I have made so many relationships in and have dedicated myself to. People say to follow your passion and mine lies with the Deaf community. I plan to follow my passion even if it means leaving the state that I have lived in my entire life, to search for more ethical testing and licensure. I would rather work in an ethical state with reasonable, adequate and strictly enforced tests. The six-year restriction would be understandable if our testing was reliable, but the fact is it isn't. Until I see the proof that the testing is consistent or licensure conditions improve, I plan on leaving after I have completed my time at UW-Milwaukee. Thank you for listening to my view, I hope you also come to realize that there are many students who feel the same as I do. If this generation of interpreter's leaves, there will be a dire need for access that simply won't be repairable if no changes are made. Therefore, I strongly urge you to support AB589.

Thank You,

Audrey Navine

Hello,

My name is Grace Mildebrandt; I am currently a student and resident in Milwaukee county.

I have been studying Sign Language at the University of Milwaukee for six years, and will finally graduate next year after seven years.

Unfortunately, under the current law, I will have six years to obtain my national certification (NIC) after graduation. If I fail to pass the NIC exam I will no longer be able to work in the field, and I will lose my standing as a Certified Interpreter. This would be a non issue in our community if the NIC exam had a reasonable pass rate, however the pass rate is currently 20%. This year alone we are losing 20+ interpreters due to their six year cycle ending.

This is why we need to pass the bill AB598/SB465

I know myself and my colleagues are freighted about our future job prospects. Statistically, only three of our class of 12 students will be able to work in the state of Wisconsin for more than six years.

Because of this six year limit, many interpreters are leaving the state of Wisconsin to find work.

This is causing an interpreter shortage, which is more serious than meets the eye.

80% of our interpreters are left to find work elsewhere, while the remaining 20% are left to work long hours, and multiple assignments a day to give our Deaf consumers access. These interpreters eventually become tired, they make mistakes, or at worst, leave the field.

This has a huge negative impact on the Deaf community who depend on interpreters for access in places like doctor appointments, court rooms, classrooms, and on days like today.

This is especially near to me because I have Deaf family members. One of my Uncles in particular is at risk of losing all residual hearing within the next few years. He will become completely Deaf. He is preparing by learning sign language. My fear for him is not that he will lose his hearing, but he will lose the freedom he once had because he can't get an interpreter when he needs one.

He is the reason I am becoming an interpreter, and the reason I am here, in front of you, today.

I don't want this bill to pass, just so I can have a job, I want this bill to pass for my Uncle, and every other person negatively affected by the interpreter shortage here in our state.

This Bill (AB589/SB465) will alleviate the interpreter shortage by allowing those whose six-year cycle has run out, to re-enter the field and continue growing their skills with the support of mentoring programs, and continued education.

I ask you to support this bill not only for its benefits to the job market, but also for the incredible benefits it has for the people in Wisconsin.

MILDEBRANDT p. 2

Thank you for your time today, and I hope you support AB589/SB465

I am in support of the Assembly Bill 589 in acts to pass the new interpreter licensure law. I am an interpreter-training student at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and will be graduating this upcoming May. This bill would break the barrier of employment upon my completion of a bachelor's degree in this field. If this bill does not pass, I will have limited time to work in the state of Wisconsin as the current law states interpreters have two license renewals, and after that, can no longer work. With that being said, this puts me at a limited four years of employment here with a degree that I worked four years to complete. I care about the quality of interpreters for the Deaf community, and if the state of Wisconsin cannot allow interpreters to renew their license, the interpreting community will diminish significantly, more so than the 15% that has already left the state this year due to the current law.

My biggest concern regarding this current law is that I will be officially entering this work field in significant turmoil. I do not want to experience restricted employment as an interpreter who has worked hard to give quality service to the Deaf community that my education at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee ensures. Back in 2010 when the law was passed regarding restricted licensure, it made sense with the high passing rate of national examinations. Now, passing rates are at a historic low that result in loss of employment in the interpreting community. If this bill passes, it will allow our field to grow and accumulate more quality interpreters with a permanent renewable license that will be monitored by an examination board (the Sign Language Interpreter Examining Board) that is already in place as a current committee.

This is most obviously a difficult time for my peers and me to be entering this profession with a time restraint. Thank you for time, consideration, and allowing me to speak on behalf of supporting the Assembly Bill 589.

Monica Corner

Hello! Thank you all for your time today. My name is Brittany Mitchell and I am a student at UW Milwaukee studying to become a Sign Language interpreter. I am testifying in support of Assembly Bill 589. I am one of nine students in my class. Smaller than your typical class of interpreting students, but we're still near the average of total number of students that graduate each year. Assuming that each of us graduates and find jobs in Wisconsin, we currently have a total of five years to improve our skills with experience and pass our National Certification exam. From an outside perspective, that sounds like a sweet deal however the passing rate for this exam is what's concerning. The current passing rate is at an alarming 30% and this includes test takers all over the spectrum. Not only are graduates with a few years under their belt taking this exam, but also seasoned professionals that are close to their six-year mark are not passing. With the current licensure law, qualified, polished and distinguished professional interpreters have been losing their licenses. I, like many other students, have invested a great deal into my education and as of now I believe this license is a ticking time bomb. We are losing more interpreters per year than come in. If the bill were to pass and we updated our approach to licensure, interpreters will be able to continue learning in the field past the 5-6 year time limit. Some people may turn their nose up at the term "indefinite license", but I can speak for myself and many other pre-certified interpreters that just because the time limit will be removed, will not change our end goal. All interpreters with good intentions strive to provide the best and most quality access for the Deaf, Hard of hearing and Deaf blind community. Our final destination is still national certification, however if we remove the time limit it will open up new opportunities to flourish within the community as well as continue providing quality services to the state of Wisconsin. If we continue on and this bill does not pass, it could quite frankly be the demise of our profession as a whole and interpreters will seek work elsewhere, driving them out of Wisconsin. With this information in mind, I hope you'll consider supporting the passing of Assembly Bill 589. Thank you, again for your time.

Brittany Mitchell

Hello, my name is Samantha Barker and I am a student at University of Wisconsin- Milwaukee. I am a double major of interpreting and American Sign Language. I have such a passion for this profession and I feel like the current bill has put up this wall that I am trying to climb over. There is a shortage of interpreters throughout Wisconsin and especially in northern Wisconsin. This affects me tremendously because I come from a family where one of my parents are deaf. When I was a senior in high school, my dad who is deaf, got diagnosed with stage 4 prostate cancer. I was a nursing intended major but after this experience, I had changed my major to interpreting and American Sign Language. I wanted to change the horrific trauma my dad went through. We, as a family had requested for an interpreter and no one was available. To remind you, my mother was working twice as hard to supply for my family so she wasn't able to be by my father's side to be his own "personal" interpreter because she needed to work and I had school. My dad needed an interpreter and failed to get one. Imagine, your loved one, hero, best friend, in a hospital unable to receive the proper communicate that any human being deserves. Us hearing people are able to go to doctor appointments, legal settings, etc. and be able to communicate easily. Deaf people need in person interpreters, using sign language is their language and this current bill is taking this access away from them. There are too many skilled interpreters that are getting their licenses taken away. Interpreter graduates have 5-6 years to pass the national certificate exam in order to continue in this profession. Also, to remind you, the passing rate is a horrific 20-30% which is incredibly unfair for all these people who graduated at a college level and earned a degree showing they are eligible to work in this profession. If this new bill passes, the time limit will vanish and interpreters can bring their skills to the community and continue to interpret. Again, we are losing interpreters and that is not respectable for the deaf consumers in our society. Keeping this information in mind, I hope you'll consider supporting the passing of Assembly Bill 589. Thank you for your time.

Samantha Barker

Richard Myhre  
Milwaukee, WI 53211

Hello, My name is Richard Myhre and I live in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. I am an interpreting training program student at the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee. I am a CODA, which means I am a child of a Deaf adult. Growing up with a Deaf mother I have witnessed, first-hand, the struggles the Deaf community faces because of the current law. Today I would like to share with you a personal experience I had. My mother had a doctor appointment and requested an interpreter and when the time came, there was no interpreter present. At the fragile age of 11 I felt obligated to help my mother and interpret in this situation I want take a second and have you visualize, being 11 years old and having that much responsibility on your shoulders. I did not have any of the necessary skills and the communication was lost. Luckily for my mother this appointment was not life or death, but this was not fair for my mother or myself. The bill presented to you today, AB589, has a key aspect, a sign language examining board. This board will insure interpreters are liable for their actions and will have penalties to prevent unqualified people from interpreting. At the time, it was assumed I could interpret because I am a CODA. To be clear, just because someone knows American Sign Language does not mean they are able to interpret. There are many skills, techniques, and rules used in interpreting that I had never been exposed to. In hindsight, I still do not feel that I would be qualified to interpret in that situation and I am a student with much more experience under my belt. This board can aid in situations like mine and help to ensure situations like this do not happen. I do not know who was at fault for not providing the requested interpreter, but the board would protect Deaf consumers, like my mother, and would have had the ability to penalize whoever was responsible. Situations like this were not uncommon in my upbringing, and many other CODAs can relate to my experience. Today I ask you to make this bill a law so this vicious cycle can stop. Thank you.



## Senator Kapenga and Representative Neylon

Thank you for taking the time to hear public testimony regarding the Sign Language Interpreter Licensure Bill AB589. My name is Theresa Schmechel. I have been a practicing community based interpreter for the past 22 years. Of those 22 years, I have held my national RID certification. In the span of two decades, I have had the privilege of interacting with a wide variety of interpreters, I've taught at the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee's Interpreter Training Program, chaired numerous workshops and conferences, and have mentored countless interpreters. Most importantly, I have been actively engaged in the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community and have seen the impact of both lack of quality and lack of quantity from our interpreter community. It is from this background that I speak in favor of this bill.

The state of Wisconsin started seeing a decline in the number of interpreters able to achieve certification when the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf changed the way they evaluated candidates for certification in an effort to streamline the testing process. This had a devastating effect plummeting the pass rate to a dismal 26%. Right about the time this happened, Wisconsin passed the first licensure bill unaware of what kind of an impact this was going to make. The state run interpreter assessment (WITA) that allowed interpreters to hold a 6 year non-renewable license was only meant to be an assessment feedback tool and it is a very outdated assessment. In addition to this, the Office for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing has mismanaged this assessment, failing to update training to evaluators as well as reducing the number of evaluators so that it takes over 5 months to get their results. I do not believe interpreters should lose their ability to work because of temporary issues regarding out tests. I believe in minimum standards for interpreters but at the same time, good interpreters are being fenced out because of testing issues that are out of their control. Licensure for our community is crucial. We can not work without a minimum standard but adjustments should be made.

This bill fixes many problems that the current bill has:

**Restricted Setting:** As it stand, interpreters who have non-renewable license can work in ANY setting. This proposal not only makes clear boundaries for interpreters who have not yet achieved an advanced certification, it informs the hearing entities of what kind of interpreter they are getting. Using a color system both informs consumers while getting our interpreters back to work serving the community.

**Examining Board:** If we are allowing interpreters to work with a less advanced certification, the implementation of this examining board is crucial. An interpreter working with a marginalized community carries a lot of responsibility. When he/she deviates from their work, it is typically an ethical issue and is not meant to be malicious. Regardless, a violation of ethics can have a significant impact on a Deaf individual's communication and rights. This examining board would give the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Community an avenue to express their concerns for a specific interpreter who has violated their ethics. Instead of strict sanctions for first time offenders, they can mandate training

so that the interpreter understands their role and responsibility. The board would also keep abreast of new skill assessments that are on the rise and find ways to incorporate them into our licensing structure. Without this board, a lesser certification-renewable license would place the community at risk. There has to be some type of monitoring of unethical practices so that interpreters are held accountable for actions that would hurt this marginalized community.

Individuals in government might try to oversimplify ethical violations and how to resolve them. I've even heard DHS say "Why not let the Better Business Bureau handle this?" or "Why doesn't the Deaf person just sue the interpreter?" Deaf individuals would not have access to these systems and hiring entities would not think to look here for information about the quality of an interpreter. This examining board will have both community representation and interpreter expertise to make good and fair solutions to some of the issues that arise in our work.

**Quality vs Quantity:** Some interpreters are concerned about a less rigorous test becoming a minimum standard in our state and allowing interpreters to work indefinitely with that certification. I too share their concern. However, I know of many interpreters who are serving their rural communities with good skills and are well liked by the Deaf people in their area - but they can't pass an advanced test. There is already a scarcity of interpreters in the rural parts of Wisconsin, and while I am not a proponent of "a bad interpreter is better than no interpreter", I believe we do need to consider the availability of interpreters in these areas. Deaf students can't even enroll in certain colleges because there is simply not enough interpreters. I believe this bill will open more doors for good interpreters to stay working but the examining board is still essential to monitor those who would violate their ethics.

The Wisconsin Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf and the Wisconsin Association of the Deaf have worked very hard to put together this bill that is mutually beneficial. I support this bill and look forward to supporting our community as we get more interpreters back to work for our community. Feel free to contact me with any questions at [theresas@uwm.edu](mailto:theresas@uwm.edu) or 262-257-0625.

Thank you,

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