

General Law Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-5224

AN ACT CONCERNING STANDARDS FOR INTERPRETERS FOR DEAF,
Title: DEAFBLIND AND HARD OF HEARING PERSONS.

Vote Date: 3/15/2022

Vote Action: Joint Favorable

PH Date: 3/1/2022

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

General Law Committee

Co-Sponsors:

Rep. Tami Zawistowski, 61st Dist.
Sen. Gary A. Winfield, 10th Dist.

Rep. Robin Green, 55th Dist.

REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill seeks to strengthen the standards for interpreters for deaf, deafblind and hard of hearing persons. This bill requires the Aging and Disability Service (ADS) to regularly update its list of registered interpreters and characterize them by the settings for which they are qualified. Also, ADS will be required to establish a webpage with information on services for the deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing people. The bill makes changes to recognize appropriately credentialed professionals as listed by the Massachusetts Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. This provision allows qualified interpreters to aid in filling the void of available interpreters in the medical and legal settings. This bill comes as a response to concerns and expressed need for clarity of definitions and standards within Connecticut.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Amy Porter, Commissioner, Department of Aging and Disability Services:

The Department of Aging and Disability Services (ADS) supports this bill which aims to improve the interpreting services provided to those who are Deaf, Deafblind, or Hard of Hearing in Connecticut. ADS notes that there is a timely improvement that they appreciate, with language updating the statute to be inclusive of people who are Deafblind. ADS also stressed the importance of strict standards for interpreters and ensuring that they hold all appropriate credentials required by statute. They do specify that they are not a law

enforcement agency, and as such have no law enforcement function or capability and could not serve in the role of enforcing the provision.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

The Connecticut Hospital Association:

The Connecticut Hospital Association (CHA) supports this bill. CHA participated on the Human Services Committee Work Group Concerning Issues Affecting Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Deafblind Persons. They believe House Bill 5224 reflects some of the issues identified and solutions discussed by the working group. Through recognizing appropriately credentialed professionals as listed by the Massachusetts Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, CHA hopes that there will be an increase in the number of available interpreters in Connecticut as there are currently gaps in the existing interpreter pool.

Dr. Harvey Corson, Co-Chair, the Connecticut Association of the Deaf Legislative and Education Committee:

Dr. Corson is in support of this bill; however, he notes that there is one omission from the bill. There is no recognition or provision for Community Interpreting setting. This setting does occur in a large percentage of all various settings – educational, community, medical and legal – and utilized and recognized by the Deaf and Interpreting Communities in the State of Connecticut as well as in the United States. They proposed additional language to be added to the bill to assist Connecticut in following Federal and state laws such as Section 504, ADA, IDEA, and Connecticut Public Act 12-173. The Connecticut Association of the Deaf Legislative and Education Committee are pleased to see the recommended needed changes/updates incorporated in the proposed legislation.

House Republican Office, State of Connecticut:

The House Republican Caucus supports this bill, a bill they requested to address the critical need for additional interpreters for deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing persons. Under the Americans with Disabilities Act, states and local governments along with businesses and nonprofit organizations that serve the public are required to effectively communicate with people who have communication disabilities. These requirements are continually being refined and updated to improve the delivery of services to deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing persons. There is a shortage of individuals qualified to provide interpreting services in both legal and medical settings. One way of addressing this shortage is to reduce barriers to registration for qualified interpreters through allowing individuals with credentials from the Massachusetts Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing to register with the Department of Aging and Disability Services. Also, this bill provides a grace period for qualified interpreters to renew their registration. These two simple changes to state statute are needed to make Connecticut a more inviting place for interpreters to work and live.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

None Expressed

Reported by: Luke Tressy, Assistant Clerk

Date: 03/22/2022