

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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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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