

Martha Andras

626 Grant St.
Hazleton, PA 18201
570-455-1324
mandras@verizon.net

March 5, 2008

To the House Professional Licensure Committee:

As initiator of the HB 1596 process, I would like to take this opportunity to offer my rationale and testimony for the amendment to the committee.

Act 57, Sign Language Interpreter and Transliterators State Registration Act, July 2, 2004, has been at the center of controversy since its passage. Although legislation of this type is needed, a serious omission exists. Act 57 failed to make provision for recent graduates of interpreter trainings programs (ITP's) to work as interpreters and earn a living in Pennsylvania after graduation. Several exceptions in Act 57 allow non-registered interpreters to work but these are mostly unpaid assignments. Consequently, some students moved to other states to gain interpreting experience. HB 1596 will remedy this situation.

Allow me to quote from the National Association of the Deaf (NAD) website. (www.nad.org)
NAD Guidelines for Developing State Legislation on Certifying and Licensing Interpreters:
"The shortage of qualified interpreters has been a crisis across America for years. Provisional/transitional license needs to be included for those non-certified interpreters who are currently working or in interpreter training. This will minimize a sudden shortage of interpreters after the effective date of the law. Also, it will give non-certified interpreters an opportunity to practice their interpreting skills before they are tested for certification."

The Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) (www.rid.org) affirms the interpreter shortage in their **State Licensure** comments. "The need for state regulation began in the early 1970's but pales in comparison to the effects produced by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which was enacted in 1990. This landmark legislation transformed the face of professional interpreting and caused the demand for interpreting services to soar to unprecedented heights. The interpreting profession is still faced with an inadequate supply of individuals to meet the growing demand."

In order to provisionally register, applicants will need to comply with the following:

1. Be a graduate of an accredited interpreter education program with an associate degree or higher and make application within five years of the graduation date.
2. Pass a written examination approved by the PA Office for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (ODHH), the NAD-RID National Interpreter Certification (NIC) Knowledge Test.
3. Pay the required registration fee.
4. Participate in a minimum of 20 hours of professional development activities during each year of provisional registration, which can be up to three years. (Initial year plus two annual renewals.)

It is my professional opinion that legal settings and mental health settings should be restricted to provisionally registered interpreters, as these settings require additional, specialized training.

However, pre-certified interpreters who have completed a degree and a supervised practicum should be at entry level for our profession and able to interpret effectively, unsupervised, in a wide variety of settings, including medical settings.

Another important change that will take place with the passing HB 1596 is that practicum students will be allowed to interpret in medical settings if they are under supervision of their mentor. This is currently prohibited by Act 57 and prevents students from gaining valuable experience interpreting in medical settings.

The intent of Act 57, "to provide for quality services to deaf, hard of hearing and hearing individuals when communicating", will not be compromised by passing HB 1596. Instead, HB 1596 will serve to strengthen Act 57, causing it to become more effective by providing for qualified candidates to obtain provisional registration, which will allow them to work and earn a living in Pennsylvania while building their skills to certification/registration level. HB 1596 will expand the available interpreter pool and is one remedy for decreasing the interpreter shortage in Pennsylvania.

One of the agencies I currently work for is the Northeast Pennsylvania Center for Independent Living (NEPACIL) in Scranton, PA. The Program Manager of Deaf Services and the Interpreter Referral Program is Mr. Thomas L. Shaffer, himself a Deaf consumer. Mr. Shaffer supports provisional registration and HB 1596. He knows first hand that often, assignments go unfilled because no interpreters are available. His perspective is that provisionally registered interpreters will be qualified to interpret in many of those assignments, and that it should be the agency's responsibility to screen, assign, and supervise the interpreters hired. Upon graduation from Bloomsburg University, I began work immediately. Most of the agencies I applied to screened my skills before I was hired. I passed the RID Knowledge Test shortly after graduation however; it took me several years to pass the RID Performance Test to become certified. Act 57 was passed during this period and my own work opportunities and earning capacity were directly affected for almost 1 year because I was not permitted to register with ODHH. At that time, RID was experiencing a huge backlog of test tapes to rate. My test tapes were caught in this backlog. I had passed the test but was not notified for 11 months as opposed to the normal timetable of 3 to 4 months. Act 57 prevented me from accepting many assignments during that time. Fortunately, RID has been working diligently to resolve the backlog situation. Had Act 57 allowed for provisional registration from the beginning, I would not have been adversely affected while awaiting my test results.

For the record, I will gain no personal benefit from HB 1596. I am an RID nationally certified, PA state-registered sign language interpreter and transliterator. I offer my testimony on behalf of the many pre-certified interpreters who were and continue to be adversely affected by Act 57. I have been in their shoes. I believe the concerns discussed above are legitimate and that after careful consideration you will recognize HB 1596 as a necessary progression in providing quality sign language interpreting and transliterating services in Pennsylvania.

Thank you for your support.

Respectfully,

Martha Andras, B.S., CI/CT