

March 5, 2008

House Professional Licensure Committee
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Representative Mike Sturla, Chairman

Regarding: HB 1596

Dear Chairman Sturla:

Sorenson Video Relay Service (VRS), a free service provided by Sorenson Communications, enables deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals to conduct video relay calls with family, friends, and business associates through a certified sign language interpreter, Sorenson videophone, TV, and a high-speed Internet connection. The deaf user sees an interpreter on their TV and signs to the interpreter, who then contacts the hearing user via a standard phone line and relays the conversation between the two parties.

Sorenson encourages all interpreters to pursue and maintain the highest standards of excellence through education and mentorship offered through the Professional Development Department. This includes workshop attendance and independent study opportunities to increase one's level of certification and skill. For interpreters who are qualified, but often not yet certified, we offer participation in the VI-P[®] (Video Interpreter – Provisional) Mentorship Program.

Unfortunately due to the restrictions of Act 57, Sorenson is unable to provide this VI-P opportunity within the state of Pennsylvania. We believe and support HB1596 believing that the amendment which allows interpreters to provisionally register and work in the state of Pennsylvania also will allow them to participate in our VI-P program and work for Sorenson. We do provide skill building workshops in Pennsylvania but we are not able to provide mentorship within our VRS centers in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh.

By providing our VI-P[®] program in more than 60 of our VRS centers company wide encompassing more than 40 states, Puerto Rico and Canada, Sorenson Communications has recognized and is taking innovative steps to address the national sign language interpreter shortage.

We would like to add Pennsylvania to our ever-growing list of states where we provide cutting-edge mentorship and interpreter training opportunities for working and future interpreters in the state.

The trainers and mentors who are employed by Sorenson Communications are highly qualified educators specializing in interpreter education and mentoring. Many hold advanced degrees and this pool of talent is not being utilized in Pennsylvania due to the limitations set forth by Act 57.

At the present time, there are simply not enough qualified interpreters to meet the ever-growing demands in the educational, community and VRS environments. There are roughly 10,000 interpreters (both state and nationally certified) to meet the needs of more than 2 million Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals who utilize the services of an interpreter. The mentorship program is working hard to increase the number of qualified interpreters not only for the VRS setting but for providing support and service in their local Deaf communities.

If allowed to provide VI-P[®] Program opportunities in Pennsylvania, interpreters will receive:

- More than 60 hours of personalized mentorship with mentors who have specialized and ongoing training in mentorship
- Permanent employment opportunities

- Ongoing skill building
- Support of their goal to achieve national certification through the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf.

The VI-P® Program at Sorenson Communications has seen more than 150 participants attain certification upon completion of the program while continuing their work in their home community and as a VRS interpreter.

It is our intention to provide such mentorship opportunities to the interpreter population in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. This, in turn, provides an invaluable service and specialized skill made available to the Deaf and Hard of Hearing constituents of the state.

Should you have any questions or would like to speak to us directly, please do not hesitate to contact us at the phone number listed below.

Warm regards,

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