

**Testimony by Tess Deckert on H.B. 1596  
for the House Professional Licensure Committee on March 5, 2008**

I would like to begin by expressing my gratitude to the committee for affording me the opportunity to come and testify regarding the amendments to Act 57 through House Bill (HB) 1596. I firmly support the amendment due to the personal and professional impact Act 57 has had on my interpreting career.

I grew up in Virginia. I came to Pennsylvania to pursue my goal of becoming a Sign Language Interpreter/Transliterater at Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania during the fall of 2003. Bloomsburg University had a wonderful reputation for providing a rigorous and enriching education in this particular field. In addition, it was one of the few institutions offering a bachelor's degree in ASL/English Interpreting. After attending school for a few years I decided to relocate to Pennsylvania and purchased a house in Bloomsburg. I had hopes of starting my professional career in Pennsylvania. In July of 2005 those hopes were significantly impacted by the passing of Act 57. I understood and appreciated the idea behind the act, and still do. I too believe it should be every interpreter's goal to become RID certified. However, the impractical implications on my and other students' careers were disconcerting. Due to the nature of the original act, I was faced with a difficult decision upon graduation; I could either stay in Pennsylvania and try to do volunteer assignments while continuing to work my part-time job in retail, or move out of state and begin my professional career as an interpreter. In August of 2007, when, student loan payments began, in addition to my mortgage payments, I made the only choice I felt I had. I accepted a full-time staff position at Northern Virginia Community College and moved back to my hometown.

Three months prior to graduation, the interpreting students at Bloomsburg University are required to undergo a practicum. This is where my skills really started to develop. I learned more in those three months than I did in all five of my American Sign Language classes. It was then, that I realized in order to continue growing and improving as an interpreter, I needed to continually be interpreting. I wanted to become certified and it was not a feasible goal if I was only interpreting sporadic volunteer and religious events. According to how Act 57 is written, those were my only professional opportunities. From my experience, as well as many certified interpreters' experiences, it is impossible to become certified without real-life interpreting under your belt. Continuous exposure to a variety of interpreting situations is how one can build his or her skill to a level at which they can pass the test for certification. Ask any certified interpreter here today, or in general, how they got to where they are. Did they only do volunteer work? Did they build their skills simply by practicing in their spare time at home? Were they able to maintain full-time work in whatever job paid their bills while trying to pursue their career on the side? Their answer will be no. They worked in the very same situations we are discussing today without the certification that is presently required. Therefore it is not only impossible to do what is recommended by Act 57, it is also somewhat hypocritical to ask. In order to advance my career I knew I needed full-time, real life exposure. I know many of my fellow graduates, current students, and professionals in the field share the same views.

I am aware that concern exists surrounding interpreters accepting assignments they may not have the skill-set to perform (ie: medical situations). For me this concern is not only unwarranted but also personally offensive. As a trained professional, I, as well as all ITP students/graduates, are taught to adhere to a Code of Ethics. The same national organization, the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID), that administers the test for certification also

developed a Code of Professional Conduct that members must follow. We automatically assume that interpreters will comply with tenet four, which states "Interpreters demonstrate respect for consumers" ([www.rid.org](http://www.rid.org)). We should be as confident that interpreters will comply with tenet two, which states "Interpreters possess the professional skills and knowledge required for the specific interpreting situation" ([www.rid.org](http://www.rid.org)). These tenets, as well as the others stated in the RID Code of Professional Conduct, guide all my decisions related to this field. HB 1596, section 5.1 (a) (2) (IV), which will require provisionally registered interpreters to pass an approved written examination, is crucial for ensuring all candidates will do the same. I passed the RID written examination in July of 2007. This examination tests our ethical decision making skills. It incorporates information that will test our knowledge concerning ten tasks specifically set by RID. The first task addresses the aforementioned concern. As per RID's website, task one for the written and performance test, is to "Assess each interpreting situation to determine if qualified for the assignment" ([www.rid.org](http://www.rid.org)). Both the Code of Professional Conduct and passing the written portion of the RID certification test prove that interpreters, whether registered or provisionally registered, will accept assignments with the appropriate discretion.

For me, leaving the state, though upsetting, was the appropriate and only choice I could make at the time. My skills have improved by means made impossible by Act 57. I work in a post-secondary environment where Deaf and Hard of Hearing adults, have requested my services by name. In Pennsylvania, they could also request my services, but how would they know to do so if they never even knew I existed. I have become a skilled interpreter that works in situations where I am qualified to interpret. I am not certified yet, but I am on my way to becoming certified. This would not be possible if I did not have constant exposure and the ability to refine my skills daily. HB 1596 would make it feasible for current and future ITP graduates to achieve their goals of becoming certified while staying in the state of Pennsylvania. It would bring back interpreters the state lost due to the implementation of Act 57 in July 2005. I know that I would move back to Pennsylvania if the amendment passes. In the end I believe the intent of the original act, as well as the professionals in our field, is to provide qualified (HB 1596, section 2 lines 31-36) interpreters who are either certified or actively plan to be certified. The rules that will govern both the state registration and the provisional registration ensure that the person interpreting out in the community will be one of the aforementioned individuals.