

FINAL REPORT

**INTERPRETIVE SERVICES STUDY
COMMITTEE**

Presented to the Legislative Council
and the Iowa General Assembly
February 1997

Prepared by the Legislative Service Bureau



Legislative
Service
Bureau

FINAL REPORT

Interpretive Services Study Committee

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MEMBERS

Senator Elaine Szymoniak,
Co-chairperson
Senator Nancy Boettger
Senator Dick Dearden

Representative Joseph Kremer,
Co-chairperson
Representative Linda Nelson
Representative Rosemary Thomson

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AUTHORIZATION AND APPOINTMENT

The Interpretive Services Interim Study Committee was created by the Legislative Council, was authorized for one meeting date during the 1996 Interim, and was provided a charge of evaluating the access to and quality of interpretive services provided for persons who are deaf or hard-of-hearing, and of reviewing related research conducted by the Deaf Services Commission of Iowa.



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1. Presentations.

The following presentations were made to the Committee at its December 2, 1996, meeting:

Deaf Services Commission. Ms. Kathryn Baumann-Reese, Division of Deaf Services, Department of Human Rights, presented a summary of access and quality issues related to interpretive services, discussed the impact of federal legislation on the demand for interpretive services, described current Deaf Services Commission interpretive and educational services, and, with Mr. Jerry McKim of the Department of Human Rights, discussed the results of an interpretive services needs assessment survey.

Ms. Baumann-Reese indicated that no census or official registry of interpretive service consumers or providers exists in the state, nor are there general state requirements regarding interpreter licensure or qualification. Some guidelines exist, such as membership in the national or state Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) organizations, or receiving satisfactory scores on quality assurance screening tests utilized in several states and by the National Association of the Deaf (NAD). She noted that the Iowa Code contains two references to RID certification within the context of a court proceeding or at time of arrest, but beyond these narrow circumstances it does not address interpreter qualifications. The RID or quality assurance screening approaches might be options for Iowa to consider in arriving at some type of state certification requirement, she suggested. With the passage of the federal Vocational Rehabilitation and Americans With Disabilities Acts, demand for services has greatly increased.

Needs Assessment Survey. Mr. McKim discussed the development and outcome of a needs assessment survey distributed to approximately 1,200 interpretive services consumers by the Deaf Services Commission. Survey findings noted by Mr. McKim include that the Deaf Services Commission is a necessary contributor of interpretive services, one third of the respondents indicated that access to professional interpreters is difficult, and that the location of interpreters in the state appears to correlate with state deaf population density, centers for higher learning, and deaf training program locations

Interpretive Services Evolution. Mr. Jim Hanson, past Supervisor of Services for the Deaf in the Vocational Rehabilitation Division, Department of Education, provided an overview of the evolution of sign language and the need for state certification for interpreters.

Mr. Hanson indicated that until the late 1950s the common practice throughout the deaf community was for family or acquaintances to provide interpretive services. This potentially placed the interpreter in a position of undue influence and could result in violations of confidentiality. In the 1960s, the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) was established in recognition of the need for professionalization of interpretive services. Historically, American Sign Language, a conceptual approach, has been the primary form of sign language. With the advent of the RID, came a

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modified "Signed English" system which is primarily language-based. Traditionally, most deaf Americans utilize American Sign Language, but the Signed English approach is favored by the education system. Interpreters may be trained in one or both approaches. One drawback of the concept-reliant American Sign Language approach is the difficulty in learning and applying language-based writing skills.

Mr. Hanson stated he is a strong proponent of RID certification, but noted that RID certification has an elitist image and is expensive and time-consuming to attain. As a result, many interpreters seek some other form of certification. These certification systems are primarily geared toward assessing present skill level, rather than imposing minimum levels of competency. Mr. Hanson indicated that virtually every other profession has some certification mechanism, and that certification will accomplish the dual objectives of protecting the deaf community and fostering a sense of group professional identity among interpreters.

Educational Interpretive Services. Ms. Jeananne Hagen and Ms. Tammy Adkins, Iowa Department of Education, and Ms. Marcia Gunderson, Iowa School for the Deaf, discussed the need for and roles of interpreters in education, training requirements, and assessment standards. Ms. Hagen indicated that, since 1975, when federal requirements providing for the education of deaf individuals in the least restrictive environment were introduced, there has been a gradual shift from institutionalization of deaf children to providing education in local settings, with a corresponding increased need for interpreters. Currently, 141 interpreters are employed by school districts in the state. Ms. Hagen described entry-level standards for educational interpreters agreed upon by the Department of Education and the area education agencies. Ms. Hagen stated that relatively few formal complaints are filed regarding the quality of educational interpreters, but access issues are widespread.

Interpretive Services in Other States. Mr. Ralph Childers, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, Department of Education, addressed access, quality, cost, and certification issues with respect to interpretive services in other states, and interpretive services within the context of vocational rehabilitation. Mr. Childers surveyed several other states, and determined that while interpreter access in metropolitan areas in all surveyed states is fairly good, it is not adequate. In rural areas there appear to be a significant shortage of interpreters and a number of corresponding access issues. Within the vocational rehabilitation context in Iowa, many offices do not have access to a qualified interpreter, and therefore the offices contract out for any required interpretive services. Mr. Childers expressed support for the development of standards regarding interpretive services, but cautioned against proceeding too quickly or imposing high-level standards which might result in a decline in the already limited access presently available.

Postsecondary Education Interpretive Services. Ms. Donna Chandler and Ms. Carol Collier, University of Iowa Student Disability Services, discussed the variety of interpretive services provided for deaf and hard-of-hearing university students,



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interpreter qualifications, and the impact of certification on access to interpreters at the University of Iowa.

Ms. Chandler indicated that there are presently nine students at the University of Iowa who are utilizing interpretive services, but this number is anticipated to increase with increased awareness of the availability of the interpretive services program. Both Ms. Chandler and Ms. Collier support some form of minimum quality assurance standard for interpreters, and view certification as a desirable goal. They maintain, however, that if mandated now, certification would decrease access by deaf individuals to services they currently possess. In Ms. Chandler's and Ms. Collier's experience, university students desire "good" interpreter qualifications, not necessarily "certified", and there would not be a sufficient number of certified interpreters in the Iowa City vicinity to satisfy the requirements of the program.

2. Committee Discussion.

Committee discussion centered on reconciling the need for some form of certification with the impact of certification on interpreter availability. The Committee agreed that at the present time imposing RID certification requirements is premature, and could worsen an already serious access shortage in some areas of the state. The Committee determined that an assessment of current interpretive service resources and the range of alternative certification methods is necessary, and that while some minimum interpretive service standard is necessary, it is unclear what that standard should be and whether it can or should fit every situation. The Committee agreed that the goal should be the ready availability of competent interpretive services, with a gradual move toward some form of certification.

3. Recommendation.

The Committee recommended that the Deaf Services Commission work with other agencies and the Legislative Service Bureau to develop a bill (attached) to be sponsored by the Interpretive Services Study Committee and included in the Committee's Final Report. The bill shall establish a Task Force comprised of the Deaf Services Commission, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation of the Department of Education, and other interested agencies, organizations, and individuals charged with developing a diagnostic feedback mechanism to assess current interpreter skill levels. The bill shall include an appropriation to cover the expense of Task Force formation. The mechanism developed shall be made available at no cost to interpreters undergoing assessment. The Task Force shall submit a progress report containing a recommendation for future action to the General Assembly within one year after formation.

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4. Written Materials Filed With the Legislative Service Bureau.

a. Access to and Quality of Sign Language Interpreting Services, submitted by Ms. Kathryn Baumann-Reese, Division of Deaf Services, Department of Human Rights.

b. Written Presentation to Interpretive Services Study Committee, submitted by Mr. Jim Hanson, past Supervisor of Services for the Deaf, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, Department of Education.

c. Survey of Other States, submitted by Mr. Ralph Childers, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, Department of Education.

d. Educational Interpreter Training, submitted by Ms. Jeananne Hagen, Department of Education.

e. Memorandum Regarding Certification, submitted by Ms. Kim Kischer-Larson, President, Iowa Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf.

f. Supreme Court Rules on the Qualifications and Compensation of Interpreters for Deaf or Hard-of-Hearing Persons.

g. Iowa Code Chapter 622B, Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Persons.

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