

## Status Report from the Idaho Sign Language Interpreters Licensure Task Force

Wednesday, January 20, 2016

In the spring of 2015, the Idaho Sign Language Interpreters licensure bill passed both the Idaho Senate and the House of Representatives. We were grateful for the overwhelmingly in-favor testimony and community involvement throughout the process. Unexpectedly, Governor Otter vetoed the bill at the eleventh hour due to concerns that there are not enough interpreters in Idaho, and that licensure would create an undue burden by requiring more interpreting to take place than is required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Idaho's interpreters, the Deaf community, task force members, and our numerous supporters were disappointed with this unexpected result. Nevertheless, the task force has been focused since that time making edits to the bill, dovetailing it more closely with the language used in the ADA, and educating our partners on the actual numbers of working interpreters across the state. The edits were made in accordance with suggestions from Idaho Bureau of Occupational Licenses, the Legislative Services Office, other state agencies, and Sponsor Representative Kelley Packer, that clearer language would ensure costs would be kept as low as possible for licensees, since valuable staff resources would not be wasted on speculation as to the intent of the law. These edits were also intended to make rule-writing and enforcement easier. We have clarified with stakeholders that the ADA requirements are unchanged; furthermore, this licensure would require that when an interpreter is brought in (as mandated by the ADA), the interpreter must hold a license to perform that work as a measure of quality control.

We were ready to proceed with the bill this 2016 legislative session. Unfortunately, we received late news that caused the task force to pause and reevaluate our strategy. An estimate has emerged that the costs of administering the interpreter licensure board would translate into an annual \$600 license fee for each interpreter. Based on that estimate, and in order to have a more reasonable annual license fee, it was suggested that the interpreter licensure board merge with an existing board from another licensed profession.

This news was shared with us just days ago, and the 2016 legislative session has already started. The task force feels strongly that the proposed \$600 annual license fee is not an accurate reflection of anticipated costs, is extremely burdensome for interpreters, and will have a pronounced adverse effect on the Deaf community. We have educated estimates that licensing could cost as little as \$125, and have conducted extensive research into the costs of licensure in other states for comparison. We are looking into the calculations; additionally, we are investigating possibly merging with another board.

This boils down to the task force's difficult decision to postpone introducing the legislation until next year, the 2017 legislative session. Postponing will give us a year to (a) quantify the exact costs to administer licenses based on interpreter population size, (b) interview a few licensed professions' boards, (c) collaborate with the selected board partner, and (d) amend the proposed legislation to reflect the merged-board collaboration. Upon passage, interpreters will still have a provisional license option should they require more time to meet license requirements.

The task force is committed to seeing this legislation pass, and to conducting the process with integrity and transparency. It is not uncommon for a bill to take four or five years to go from idea to law. We have been actively seeking this legislation since 2014 - a seemingly long time, but well within reason. So much good will come from this legislation - the Deaf community, agencies/businesses that provide interpreters, and interpreters themselves will finally have a way to measure and validate quality. Via statewide town hall meetings held in 2014, the task force believes we understand the needs, desires, and concerns of the Deaf community, interpreters, agencies, and other stakeholders. We've noted a collective excitement to see this legislation come to fruition - an effort that both protects consumers and legitimizes the work of interpreters.

Respectfully Submitted,

The Idaho Sign Language Interpreters Licensure Task Force

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