

ONE HUNDRED THIRD LEGISLATURE

SECOND SESSION

LEGISLATIVE RESOLUTION 517

Introduced by Haar, 21.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this resolution is to study ways to improve the quality and availability of interpreter services for Nebraskans who are deaf or hard of hearing. The study committee shall coordinate with the Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing to work with interested stakeholders to identify the areas of concern, conduct necessary research, and explore various ways to address quality and availability issues. The study should:

(1) Examine why there is a shortage of qualified, licensed interpreters in the State of Nebraska;

(2) Examine complaints and concerns from the deaf and hard of hearing community about the proficiency and competency of interpreters in both educational settings and community settings;

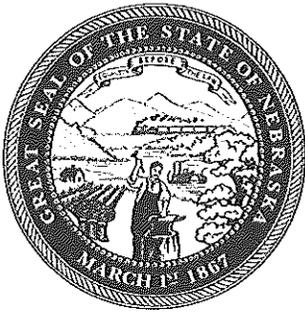
(3) Find opportunities to share and address competency and proficiency issues of sign language interpreters among concerned stakeholders including, but not limited to, the Nebraska educational community, the deaf and hard of hearing community, American Sign Language interpreters, and health care providers; and

(4) Include any other issues that the study committee deems relevant.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE MEMBERS OF THE ONE HUNDRED THIRD LEGISLATURE OF NEBRASKA, SECOND SESSION:

1. That the Health and Human Services Committee of the Legislature shall be designated to conduct an interim study to carry out the purposes of this resolution.

2. That the committee shall upon the conclusion of its study make a report of its findings, together with its recommendations, to the Legislative Council or Legislature.



STATE OF NEBRASKA

NEBRASKA COMMISSION FOR THE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING

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Governor

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Senator Ken Haar
District 21
P.O. Box 94604
State Capitol
Lincoln, NE 68509

RE: Legislative Resolution 517 Report and Recommendations

Dear Senator Haar,

You requested the Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (NCDHH) to work with interested stakeholders to research ways on enhancing the quality and availability of interpreter services for Nebraskans who are Deaf, Deaf-Blind, and Hard of Hearing.

Among these interested stakeholders, the NCDHH Board established a Steering Committee to develop a strategy of gathering research and recommendations within the community. Included in the LR 517 report are a list of workgroups and individuals who participated, along with a brief description of their findings and recommendations. These include the need to enhance the skill level of Educational Interpreters, raise the professionalism expectations of Community Interpreters and express the need of funding for the training and mentoring of interpreters.

The NCDHH Board reviewed these Committee recommendations at the December 12th meeting. The Board directed me to share with you their specific comments relating to these recommendations in the settings of education and community interpreting.

Education:

We should continue to work to ensure the best possible interpreters in public schools to provide communication access for children who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing. Action is required now to ensure these students have the best educational opportunities and maximize their career opportunities in the future. This can be accomplished, in part, by raising the State law for the Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment (EIPA), with raising score requirement from a 3.5 to 4.0. In addition, new interpreters hired by school districts should hold a minimum education requirement. Finally, in support of these recommendations the Nebraska Department of Education should be provided additional funds dedicated for intensive training for educational interpreters. These funds would be used to improve their performance rating to ensure students are receiving quality of interpreting services to meet educational communication needs.

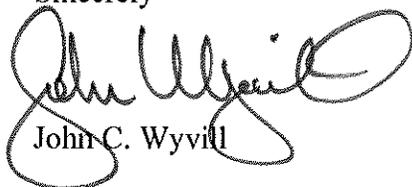
Community

There is a critical need to expand the licensure requirements of interpreters that provide services in a community setting. Currently, not all community setting interpreters are licensed, leading to the inability to regulate the proficiency and competency. The NCDHH Board recommended that all interpreters, with the exception of educational and religious interpreters, should be licensed to ensure effect communication and ethical standards are being provided. Also, mentoring program funding support is essential to address the shortage of interpreters in Nebraska.

Implementation of the LR 517 recommendations will have a direct impact to improve the lives of the Deaf, Deaf-Blind and Hard of Hearing.

Thank you for championing LR 517 and making a difference. I look forward to meeting with you in the near future to discuss possible next steps.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John C. Wyvill". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "W".

John C. Wyvill

Enclosures LR 517 Resolution
LR 517 Report and Recommendations

CC: Senator Kathy Campbell, Chair Health and Human Services Committee
NCDHH Board members
LR 517 Steering Committee members

Legislative Resolution 517

Steering Committee Members

Margie Propp, NCDHH Board Member

Dr. Frank Turk, NCDHH Board Member

Dillard Delts, Former NCDHH Board Member

Stacy Luther, Nebraska Hands and Voices

Dr. Julie Delkamiller, UNO

Jonathan Scherling, Nebraska Association for the Deaf

Rhonda Fleischer, Department of Education

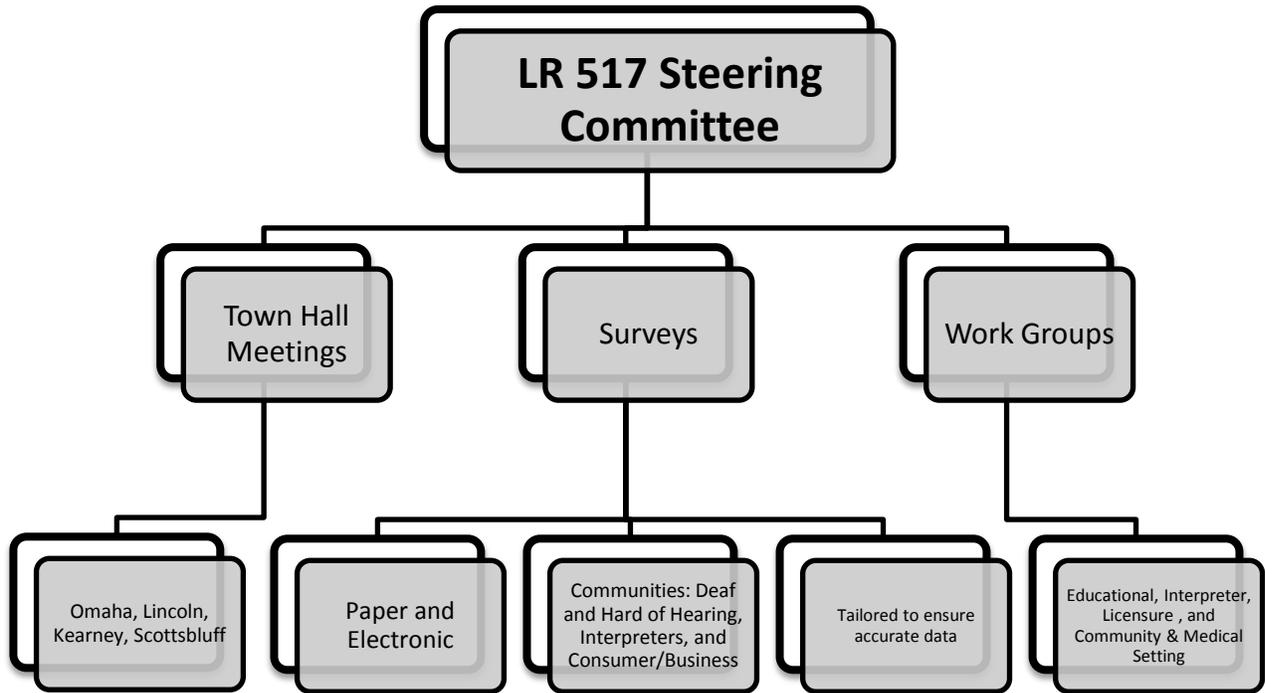
Teresa Coonts, Department of Education

Colleen Richart, Nebraska Hands and Voices/Guide By Your Side

Jerry Siders, Deaf community

Warren Reynolds, Hearing Loss Association of America, Omaha Chapter

All Data Reports to Steering Committee



Workgroup Members

Education

Dr. Peter Seiler, Nebraska Association of the Deaf
John Neal, Lincoln Public Schools
Teresa Coonts, Department of Education
Sara Peterson, Educational Service Unit
Rhonda Fleischer, Department of Education
Jill Bird, Lincoln Public Schools
Stacy Luther, Hands and Voices
Margie Propp, NCDHH Board Member
Kim Frowick, Parent of a Deaf child
Frances Beurivage, Boys Town National Research Hospital

Interpreter

Dr. Frank Turk, NCDHH Board Member
Ben Sparks, Interpreter
Pamela Duncan, Interpreter
Rhonda Rankin, Nebraska Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf
Norm Weverka, Omaha Association of the Deaf
Tami Richardson-Nelson, Creighton University
Carol Helleberg, Grand Island

Licensure

Margie Propp, NCDHH Board Member
Peggy Williams, NCDHH Mental Health Specialist
Rhonda Rankin, Nebraska Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf
Barbara Woodhead, UNL
Gary Theiler, Deaf community
Andrew Snarr, Sorenson

Judy Gouldsmith, Interpreter Coordinator, MCC

Community/Medical

Jonathan Scherling, Nebraska Association of the Deaf

Dr. Peter Seiler, Nebraska Association of the Deaf

Kathleen Valle, Alegent Creighton Health

Kristin McFarland, St. Elizabeth

Kim Davis, NCDHH Field Representative

Carol Brown, LanguageLinc Interpretation Services

Dillard W. Delts, Former NCDHH Board Member

Town Hall Meetings

Town Hall Meetings were conducted in Omaha, Lincoln, Kearney, and Scottsbluff.

Scottsbluff: Thursday, June 12th at Educational Service Unit. More than 30 residents in Western Nebraska came to express need for more services in the surrounding areas.

Omaha: Thursday, September 25th at Swanson Library

Lincoln: Thursday, October 16th at Williams Library. Discussion topics included Interpreter Services in the Educational setting regarding qualified interpreters.

Kearney: Thursday, October 28th at Kearney Police Station Conference Room

Interpreter Survey

Surveys were submitted to the Commission's list of licensed interpreters, as well as distribution help of Nebraska Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (NeRID), Omaha Association for the Deaf (OAD), Lincoln Association for the Deaf (LAD), Nebraska Association of the Deaf (NeAD), Educational Interpreters, and general community interpreters. Nearly 30 survey results were received. A copy of the survey is listed below:

The most telling results of the survey were answers from two open-ended questions: "In your opinion, are there enough qualified interpreters in Nebraska?" Every survey responded "No" to some areas of Nebraska; specifically Western Nebraska.

The next question was: "As an interpreter, what do you view as a major issue facing interpreters? Why?" The responses were:

- No mentoring program for interpreters

- Ethics: Interpreters need to be trained for scenarios on professionalism and the ability to make ethical decisions given certain situations
- Lack of governance over interpreters: There is little monitoring system to ensure quality and proficiency of interpreters
- Unqualified interpreters working in the education system.
- Testing improvements: The need to explore testing for interpreters; for example: some interpreters may have excellent skill sets in the field, but be lousy test takers
- Lack of skills and experience directly out of an Interpreter Training Program (ITP): essentially “throwing” an interpreter into the interpreting field without substantial training and mentoring
- No evaluation program for seasoned interpreters; there is no peer or professional feedback for interpreters to evaluate their performance
- More workshops and training for interpreters
- More Bachelor Interpreter Studies programs available
- Situational problems within Video Relay Service (VRS) industry, specifically professionalism in the setting.
- The question of uncertainty for interpreters in the future. With rule changes, will interpreters be qualified one day and unqualified the next day?
- Smaller school districts with limited job availability for interpreters; whether it is minimal pay or only part-time offerings.

Steering Committee Meetings

The Steering Committee met a total of five times

- July 22, NCDHH Lincoln office, introduction of steering committee and the plan for all workgroups throughout the following months
- September 29, NCDHH Lincoln office, review progress of work groups thus far
- October 24, NCDHH Lincoln office
- November 21, NCDHH Lincoln office, review of entire work group suggestions for recommendations, make additional comments/revisions
- December 8, NCDHH Lincoln office, final steering committee meeting, review and finalization of all workgroup recommendations.

Each workgroup met various times throughout late summer and fall, discussing areas needing improvement for interpreter quality and availability. These suggestions were then submitted to the Steering Committee to revise and finalize.

Recommendations

Community Interpreters (Community/Medical, Licensing, & Interpreter Workgroup)

Professionalism	Licensure	Mentoring/Training	Promote Awareness
A process to evaluate complaints	All interpreters should be licensed (except religion, educational interpreters)	Develop a mentor program. Similar to Mentoring Interpreters Across Nebraska (M.I.A.N)	Create Job Fairs
Ethics Continuing Education Units (CEUs): related to License renewal	Establish and Maintain a Video Remote Interpreting (VRI) Business License	Enhance & increase Interpreter Training Programs (ITP)	Grant funding for Video Remote Interpreting (VRI) specifically Rural NE
Peer Feedback process: Peer evaluation process of fellow interpreters skills	Grievance Procedures	Collaboration with hospitals	Explore funding sources
Identify/Inform when National Interpreter Certification (NIC) is available in the region		Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Nebraska Association of the Deaf, Nebraska Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, and Hearing Loss Association of America work together to create workshops and training	Legislature to recognize American Sign Language (ASL) as World Language
		Mental Health: Create mentoring/shadowing and intensive workshops	

Educational Interpreters

Professionalism	Licensure	Mentoring/Training	Promote Awareness
Funded professional development	Increase Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment (EIPA) license requirement score from 3.5 → 4.0 (in rule 51)	Workshops for parents, students, administrators, teachers, staff	Establish career academy in high schools
Create funded position: Coordinator of Stakeholders involved with the education of Deaf/Hard of Hearing children	Interpreters with an EIPA Score below 3.9 will be given 2 years to attain a score of 4.0	Funded intensive training for educational interpreters to help raise EIPA score Accessible statewide	Scholarship Funding For Educational interpreters
Educational interpreters to evaluate each other and provide feedback to peers	New hires are to complete educational requirements (similar to the model at New Jersey): at least A.A. degree * History, Sociology & Psychology of Deaf/Hard of Hearing * Deaf-Blind	Collaboration with deaf/hard of hearing community, NDE * opening communication * providing workshops	More sign language clubs in schools at all levels
Develop feedback form for parents and children		Deaf participation in NDE meetings	Provide ASL classes in high schools
		Develop Interpreter Training Program (ITP) for Educational Interpreters	Job Fairs in high schools