

are talking about which Department of Public Institutions and the Commission on Hearing Impaired have agreed that we need this specialist and that the commission should be the group that would hire that person. So what I'm saying to you is think about the people. Yes, there will be an A bill and, yes, it will come along with all the other A bills and it's sorted out with the wheat and the chaff at the end of the session. In the meantime when the hearing-impaired comes to Appropriations, they do have it in their budget. They do have this expansion in their budget and the Appropriations Committee has to weigh that, along with all the other things that we look at, and decide whether or not we can put the money in. This bill is a backup because Appropriations, the way they operate these days, and let me tell you, folks, I'm there every day, they're not okaying very much. So, I do...in the first place, I think we all need to be aware of the problem that hearing-impaired people have. It is unique from the very point of view that they can't hear and so they need someone, they need people to help the people that work with them try to understand the hearing-impaired. You know from your own experience that it's difficult to understand and communicate with a person who cannot hear. You may have somebody in your own family, as a person grows older they can't hear. Quite often that person withdraws a little bit, even in a family circle, they will be sitting on the edge because they don't know what's going on and so they just try not to participate. So what I'm asking you today is give an objective look to the idea of this bill. The thrust of the bill is for the commission to hire a specialist who will coordinate the services for the hearing-impaired and the hard of hearing and deaf people who have a drug and alcohol abuse problem or who are mentally ill. Department of Public Institutions is not actually addressing that problem. They do it in a minimal way but not the way that it's really needed and they have come, after we've worked, this must be four years now that I've been at this trying to bring these people together so they would understand that the need is there and so they have finally come to the point where they would allow the commission to do this, and tell me, folks, that's a giant step forward for this group, let me tell you, it is. So I will reiterate that deaf and hard of hearing persons suffer a lack of appropriate mental health services, not only do they...they don't have the same choices when asked to select a program for treatment that other people have. They have no choices at all for the deaf person. It's not a matter of selecting the program they can afford or the one that is closest to home. Currently, there is only one program