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ASL/English Interpreter

I appreciate the opportunity to respond in writing to the proposal of HB 525. Unfortunately I cannot be there in person, as I am working, providing access to the Deaf Community...the very Deaf Community that will be hurt if HB 525 passes.

As an ASL/English Interpreter with 30 years of experience, who serves the NH Deaf/DeafBlind/Hard of Hearing Community, I strongly oppose this bill. The NH Deaf Community is unique and unlike those served by other professional organizations and licensure boards. The complexities of serving our Deaf/DeafBlind/Hard of Hearing community require an organization of people who know them, who are them, who understand them. If the Office of Deaf and Hard of Hearing (ODHH) and/or the NH Interpreter Licensure Board (NHILB) are moved to the Office of Professional Licensure and Certification (OPLC) it will do a disservice to Deaf/DeafBlind/Hard of Hearing people and the entities who provide services to them, such as doctors, hospitals, employers, public agencies, schools, social service agencies, and many more. It will also have a negative impact on ASL Interpreters, Deaf Interpreters, and the myriad of entities who contract us for services, who aim to remove linguistic and cultural barriers to a very unique group of citizens.

First, let me address The Program for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. This office has been under the auspices of Vocational Rehabilitation for as long as I have known. It works. DOE/VR and those in the Office of Deaf and Hard of Hearing (ODHH) know what they are doing. They put the needs of the Deaf/DeafBlind/Hard of Hearing community first. I fear that if ODHH moves to a different department that our community members will not be served. Deaf/DeafBlind/Hard of Hearing individuals, and the Interpreters who provide language access services, are a unique group. They will be severely underserved if grouped in with other licensed professionals.

The OPLC issues licenses to Accountants, Estheticians, Home Inspectors, Massage Therapists, Mental Health practitioners, Nurses, Pharmacy Technicians, Real Estate agents, and many many more. All of these licensed positions provide services to the general public, the HEARING PUBLIC. ASL Interpreters bridge the gap between the Deaf/DeafBlind/Hard of Hearing Community and these professionals, because, generally, they don't have the language, the cultural knowledge, and the expertise that is required. They do THEIR JOBS well. WE do OUR JOBS well. We will not be able to continue to do our jobs well if we are governed by a group of people who don't understand us or the people to whom we provide services.

The ODHH and the NHILB are different and should not be bundled together. Neither of them should be part of OPLC. It is unlikely that OPLC will understand Deaf Culture, American Sign Language and its nuances, Interpreter credentialing, etc. These things are crucial to the continued success of members of the Deaf/DeafBlind/Hard of Hearing Community and to the members of the Interpreting Community. In fact, NHILB funds are meant for training, advocacy and Interpreter testing. Will OPLC keep those monies separate from general licensure funds to continue supporting, educating and testing NH Interpreters? If the answer is 'no' then you must not let this bill pass.