

**Testimony of Chriz Dally, Chair of the Kansas Commission for the Deaf and
Hard of Hearing before the House Education Committee on
Bill SB 185- Clarifying the Authority of the KCDHH
March 24, 2021**

Dear Representative Huebert and Members of the House Education Committee,

Thank you for your time today to consider our testimonies on this bill. My name is Chriz Dally. I am the Chair of the Kansas Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (KCDHH), an independent agency that is administratively housed within the Department of Children and Families (DCF). I have been a member of the Commission since 2014, putting me in a position of doing what I love best; making sure that the “voice” of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community is being heard.

KCDHH plays a significant role to ensure that equitable access and other needs are being met in the lives of 225,000 Kansans who are: **Deaf** (6,000+), **Hard-of-Hearing** (15,000+), **Late-Deafened** (200,000+), **Deaf-Blind** (500+), and **Hearing** (those who can hear) including but not limited to:

- Parents/ Guardians with D/HH children (2,000+)
- Sign Language Interpreters and other Service Providers (400+)
- Professionals working with or for D/HH people (200+)
- Employers (100+) and employees (numerous!) who hire/work with D/HH people
- Agencies or businesses who provide services/ goods (numerous!)
- Nonverbal (due to speech impairments or brain processing disorders)

The first four subgroups above (abbreviated as **D/HH**) represents those of all ages from birth to senior citizens, cutting across all demographics, and participate in various work, educational or social settings that exists within our cities, towns and rural areas. They all vary in their needs, conditions, preferences, or abilities, some having special needs (other disabilities) and/or challenges in their lives (drug/mental health issues). They range in being fluent in a language(s) to having significant language delays. They also range in their preference in how they prefer to communicate or access information, such as using sign language, captioning or hearing aids or other assistive devices. KCDHH, does indeed, serve a broad and diverse D/HH community within mainstream society where all these lives intersect.

As a place of expertise and resource, KCDHH functions as an advocacy and coordinating agency to best serve D/HH people, by advocating for and facilitating equal and equitable access to a variety of comprehensive services that are publically available or in need of being developed. For example, during the early stages of the pandemic, KCDHH quickly responded to complaints that the Governor’s Office was not providing viewable interpreting services during their public addresses and KCDHH was able to assist the Office in understanding how they can better meet the needs of their D/HH constituents. Also, KCDHH worked with the Health department

to ensure that clear masks would be made available for those who relied on their speech-reading skills during the pandemic. KCDHH diligently follows obligations that have been outlined in our Kansas statutes since the 1980's and 1990's, however these statues are in need of being updated which is why we come before you today.

Your support will help us resolve outdated information and obstacles in two important ways. One, most importantly, it will update statutes that clarify that any communication access service provider (including interpreters) must register with KCDHH, which will help us better meet the diverse needs of D/HH people. We want to ensure that these providers meet qualification levels that consumers and businesses would expect. This protects ALL interests, including the 1) D/HH consumers in getting their communication access needs met, 2) businesses hiring the provider (such as yourselves in hiring the interpreters/ captionists provided during this hearing), and 3) providers themselves concerned that unqualified individuals are harming the standards and reputation of their profession in which they trained and worked hard to attain. We have all seen, too many times, when a person claiming to be able to "interpret" being hired with unsatisfactory and sometimes harmful results. Case in point, the Tampa Police Department hired someone who said she can interpret, for an important press conference in 2017, only to find out from an angry public that she was clueless in how to sign. This was an embarrassing, yet avoidable, fiasco for the department had they checked for certification or proof of qualifications. Now, imagine if the same thing happened in much more serious situations such as within emergency rooms or the court rooms where critical and immediate communication facilitation is paramount.

The second area where your support will help is to clarify a few areas where there are differing interpretations on who has authority in meeting these obligations between the KCDHH Commission and DCF which has been an ongoing issue, and we all agreed that these should be clarified legislatively.

Please know that this bill represents several years of comprehensive work, analysis, perspectives, and involvement between members on the KCDHH commission, DCF leadership, Kansas Attorney General's Office and Kansas legislators and revisors. We also have the strong support for this bill by members of the D/HH community and their allies, including sign language interpreters, as you will see from the testimonies. Based on our work, I am confident that we have the best possible bill that we can present to you for your timely consideration.

Thank you for your time. Your support will put KCDHH in a better position to address critical concerns and initiatives as outlined in our informative and comprehensive 2019 KCDHH Annual Report (attached with this testimony).

Respectfully,

Chriz Dally, Chair
Kansas Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing