

Senate Bill No. 185 before House Education Committee
Testimony of Leonard Hall, Attorney and KCDHH Commission Vice-Chair

My name is Leonard Hall. I am an attorney and a vice-chair of the KCDHH Commission. I have been fortunate to be involved with legislation for the KCDHH Commission in 1982 and later legislation which amended the state statutes.

KCDHH staff received 500 to 800 phone calls, emails or contacts every month from the courts, law enforcement agencies, government agencies, businesses, deaf and hard of hearing people and public.

The current statute and proposed amendments allow the KCDHH and its Executive Director to provide for a program of regulations and certification of interpreters for more than 400 interpreters providing interpreting services for hundreds of deaf and hard of hearing people and businesses in courts, public accommodation, employment, government programs and other areas across the state of Kansas every day. Most interpreters need to register or show proof of certification from the Commission in order to secure employment or to work as an interpreter.

KCDHH program for interpreters has worked well for almost 40 years. It has been amazing that KCDHH has been able to provide for an effective program for interpreters in Kansas for many years with some difficulties. There are red flags appearing in other states where individuals acting as (unqualified) interpreters took advantage of deaf senior citizens (financial) and deaf children (sexual abuses) as well as performing poorly in sign language interpretation causing major problems for deaf people in many areas, including employment and law enforcement.

The reason for SB 185 is to provide better clarification and authority for KCDHH regarding all interpreters and communication access services in Kansas. There is a major need to update the current state laws on interpreting to address several matters such as:

- Technology advances such as VRI (video remote interpreting services) and other areas.
- Ability to set registration fees and provide other supports for interpreters.
- Registration of sign language interpreters who interpret in Kansas, including courts, public accommodation, employment, government programs and other areas.
- Providing fingerprinting and background checks for interpreters.
- Providing an oversight and development of other communication access services.
- Providing better communication access services, such as real-time translation services, support services for the deaf-blind and other effective communication method for deaf and hard of hearing individuals.

There are other provisions in the proposed SB 185 addressing other needs which I can spend a lot of time on, but these provisions are needed. SB 185 will allow KCDHH to provide for a more effective system pertaining to all interpreters and communication access services for deaf and hard of hearing people across Kansas.