



State of Rhode Island

# Rhode Island Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

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March 19, 2026

House Committee on Health & Human Services  
Rhode Island General Assembly

Re: H7932 – Concerns and Recommended Amendment

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee:

I am writing in my capacity as Executive Director of the Rhode Island Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (CDHH) regarding H7932. I regretfully am unable to show up today as I'm sick.

After reviewing the bill as drafted, I must respectfully state that CDHH cannot support the legislation in its current form. The structure and intent of the bill are unclear, and as written, it would be difficult—if not impossible—to implement effectively.

The bill proposes that CDHH approve any reduction in American Sign Language interpreter services in hospitals and other public service facilities. However, CDHH does not currently have regulatory authority, oversight responsibility, or enforcement mechanisms related to interpreter services in these settings. As a result, the bill assigns responsibility to CDHH in an area where it has no statutory role, creating confusion and practical barriers to implementation.

More broadly, the bill appears to place interpreter-related regulatory authority within the Department of Health (DOH) without a clearly defined or meaningful role for CDHH. This approach does not align with the state's existing expertise or the realities of interpreter access.

CDHH is the state's designated entity with specialized expertise in issues affecting Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing Rhode Islanders, including communication access and the use of qualified interpreters. Our agency routinely works with consumers, providers, and state systems to address interpreter access challenges, including significant delays in licensure and a persistent statewide and national shortage of qualified interpreters.

We have received numerous reports from individuals experiencing delays in obtaining interpreter licensure, which can directly impact access to critical services. In this context, any regulatory changes affecting interpreters must be informed by the lived realities of the community and the operational challenges within the field.

For these reasons, we strongly recommend that the bill be amended to require meaningful involvement from CDHH in any regulatory changes related to interpreters. At a minimum, CDHH should have a formal role in reviewing and approving such changes. This would help ensure that policies are practical, responsive, and aligned with the communication access needs of Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing individuals.

Additionally, we encourage the Committee to consider whether DOH is the most appropriate entity to oversee interpreter-related regulatory functions, or whether a more collaborative or alternative structure would better serve the state.

We appreciate the intent to address interpreter-related issues and stand ready to work with the sponsor and the Committee to revise the bill in a way that is clear, implementable, and effective.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

*Michelle L Cline*

Michelle Cline  
Executive Director  
Rhode Island Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing



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