# To: Subcommittee on Communication Services (SOCS) for Persons Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing and Persons with Speech Disabilities

# C/O Aging and Disability Services Division3416 Goni Road, Suite D-132Carson City, NV 89706

To Whom It May Concern:

As an interpreter and peripheral member of the Deaf community, I have seen much since moving here in 2006. I have watched the Deaf struggle and make little progress in areas that really matter. **The problems that face Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals in Nevada are real and severe:**

1. Deaf education in Nevada lags behind other states. Hearing impaired students graduate at a literacy level far below their hearing counterparts.

2. The Deaf community has a very high unemployment rates, most are dependent upon government assistance. Many are institutionalized.

3. There is a serious lack of interpreters in Northern and rural Nevada. This leads to a gap in service accommodations for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community.

4. Many state institutions are still non-compliant with the ADA - in that they are unable to provide appropriate accommodations, whether that means medical/legal interpreting services or real time captioning for legislative sessions and other vital resources within the community at large.

5. There are currently no Deaf service centers in Northern Nevada. Many Deaf are isolated, uneducated, poor, and without any kind of advocacy or support services available to them.

A number of remedies might be considered to address these problems, but the idea that I propose would address more than one.

***It is my conviction that the creation of an Interpreter Training Program (ITP) will solve many of the community’s needs.***

**What benefits might be had from an ITP in Northern Nevada?**

1. It will train interpreters to work here, in our schools and communities.
2. It will create jobs for Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals.

Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals can be hired at many levels within the program: instructors, tutors, support staff, admin etc. But they must be there, the Deaf community must have a stake in the success of the program, or it will not succeed.

3. It will open a portal to higher education for all Deaf youth.

The presence of educated Deaf role models working in higher education, teaching students to be interpreters, and taking positions of leadership, will create wonderful possibilities in the imagination of our Deaf youth. Deaf professionals working in an ITP will provide a vision, and a potential path to a greater dream. And, with more interpreters in the area to provide services, and Deaf role models already working in campus settings, Deaf teens will make the transition to continuing education more readily.

4. More interpreters working in the area means ADA compliance is easier for the State.

The current deficit of interpreting services leaves the State open to potential liability suits under the ADA Title II. Creating an ITP will give the State of Nevada a viable means to satisfy the demands from the community for access to government services, and also to protect itself from litigation.

5. The ITP can also act as a neutral, non-divisive, state sponsored space for working toward a collective goal.

The ITP can become an ‘institution of support, without interfering in the Deaf Community’s right to self-determination, or control of service centers.

**What would be required of the Deaf Community?**

For the ITP to succeed, the Deaf must have a hand in the creation of the interpreters they so badly need. And, the interpreters need real opportunities for hands-on learning. They need massive exposure to sign language, internships, and mentorships, within the Deaf community they will be serving. The Deaf community also has a responsibility to make themselves available to the students who are learning their language, by putting on, and attending mixed events, working in the ITP, beings tutors, teachers, assistants, even guest speakers. The Deaf Community is the only place where students will get a chance to truly practice their skills. The Community must provide that too them.

(Other foreign language learners usually reach a place of minimal proficiency, and then travel to a country that uses the language for an ‘immersion experience.’ This last phase of language acquisition is essential for true fluency. The difference with sign language is that they is no Deaf country. The only immersion experience to be had will have to be provided by the Community itself.)

**What is required from NSHE (Nevada System of Higher Education)?**

 Another essential element for success would be a coordination of efforts between all the institutions of NSHE in Northern Nevada: UNR, TMCC, WNC, and satellite campuses.

Whichever campus takes up the ITP, the others ought to provide the necessary prerequisite classes so that any Nevada student who qualifies can transition from ASL classes into the ITP.

Additionally, internships are essential to the creation of good interpreters. For this reason WNC, TMCC and UNR can/should provide these much needed learning opportunities. If the campus Disability Service Centers can coordinate internships opportunities for 4th year ITP students, they will be helping to create the interpreting resources they will be drawing upon for years to come.

Not all graduating interpreters may choose to stay in the Truckee Meadows, but some will, and there is work for them in our growing community.

**What would the ITP look like?**

The best instructors will likely be Deaf.

It is not enough for hearing interpreters to training new interpreters. When only hearing teach hearing the loop is closed, and the learning process does not include the Deaf Community, who are the real stakeholders. The result is that baby interpreters fail. They fail because they do not have the contacts and support to reach the level of fluency required to succeed. Only extended exposure to the natural language in action can provide that kind of language mastery; therefore, fluent Deaf signers must be included in the program. I recommend that a minimum of 50% or more of all instructors to be fluent Deaf signers.

Vital positions in the program should be sufficiently funded, and offer enough security to attract talented Deaf professionals from around the country.

The national standard curriculum for teaching ASL is “Signing Naturally”, which averages two to three years to complete, and includes levels 1-4 (some require 1-6). This is considered the minimum level of acquisition needed before entering an ITP. Most ITPS start *after* the completion of level 4 (or 6), and run for two more years. ITPs include classes on speed, fluency, and linguistics, as well as interpreting strategies, protocol, laws that apply, and ethics. Although some colleges have offered both levels 1-4 and ITP concurrently, I do not recommend it. Any program of quality will require first 1-4 (or 6), and then the ITP, a total of four years. Language learners with four years of study can be made ready to enter the field as baby interpreters and cut their teeth on lighter assignments, and internships until achieving professional certification.

The most prestigious ITP programs on the West Coast are at Western Oregon University (WOU), which offers a B.A. in ASL interpreting.

<https://www.wou.edu/education/sped/bsbai.php>

AND

California State University at Northridge (CSUN) which also offers a B.A. in ASL interpreting.

<http://www.csun.edu/eisner-education/deaf-studies/interpreter-education-program>

These program are both comprehensive and challenging, for that reason graduates have a high rate of success. Nevada can use programs like these as a template to create one for our state. If it is well staffed and funded, it will attract students from out of state, as well as giving our own students a path to success in a growing field.

\*Interpreting is a great job opportunity: <http://wqad.com/2015/10/21/demand-for-sign-language-interpreters-expected-to-rise-nearly-50/>

**Where NSHE stands now:**

There is a program in place now at WNC, but it is not achieving these benchmarks because it is not really an ITP, it is a Deaf Studies program. Having a Deaf Studies degree doesn’t make anyone qualified to be an interpreter, although it is a good start. WNC isn’t an ITP and hasn’t succeeded in producing more than a hand full of community interpreters over the course of many years.

**TMCC:** In the past few years, they have scaled back their sign language program and offers minimal sections of levels 1-4 every other semester.

**UNR:** Also offers only a meager amount of staggered ASL courses, levels 1-4.
**WNC:** has traditionally been the only campus to offer levels 5 and 6, but I am unsure whether they still do so. They offer two courses on interpreting skills; however,

none of the campuses in Northern Nevada are offering anything like a comprehensive ITP.

(I taught ASL for several years at TMCC and was able to generate a high level of excitement about the profession. My top three students are now in ITPs in Oregon and California. They were unable to take levels 5 & 6 in Nevada, so they completed those pre-requisites on their new campuses. Unfortunately, they do not plan to return to our state to work.)

We need a place where learning sign is what enriches both hearing and Deaf communities, a program that produces not just good signers, but high quality interpreters - ones that will garner professional respect because they will know and understand the communities they work in.

A robust ITP operating in Northern NV could aim to put three new interpreters into the field for each year, and will definitely flood the area with aspiring learners and baby-interpreters. I believe that a high quality program, with stringent standards, and strong Deaf community support will create the quality interpreters we need. With the establishment of a comprehensive ITP, I think we will see big changes in the quality of life for Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals in Northern Nevada.

Thank you for considering this idea as a part of your vision for the future of Nevada’s Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and signing communities.

Sincerely,

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