

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing on behalf of Nevada's Aging and Disability Services Division Interpreter Subcommittee in support of the ASL program at the University of Nevada, Reno. To start, Northern Nevada's Deaf community has experienced a long-standing shortage of local qualified sign language interpreters. In the years following the COVID-19 outbreak, this shortage has only increased. The impact of this forces Deaf and hard of hearing individuals to confront barriers to access in their day to day lives. Children in our school districts go without access to their education for months at a time. Patients must often go without essential and complete access to their medical appointments. Employers and employees both struggle to find interpreters for orientations, trainings and meetings. This also puts a strain on the interpreting agencies, local businesses and institutions that struggle to meet the community's accessibility needs. Moreover, ADA law mandates accessibility in many places, and a lack of qualified interpreters makes it difficult to provide that.

The University of Nevada, Reno's ASL program would prove to become a beacon of hope for accessibility in Northern Nevada as well as the entire state. What starts now as a minor degree in ASL could become so much more in the future. If the university were to establish a B.A. in Interpreting program, it would be one of the very few available in the United States. This would allow for interpreting students from all over the country to become potential future Nevada residents. Most importantly, UNR's intent to make this a Deaf-led program will make a unique and profound statement, and it will prove as an example of UNR's dedication to inclusivity and accessibility for the local community. It will ultimately ensure that students of UNR's ASL program are learning from native signers and are on the path to becoming truly skilled, qualified interpreters.

Our agency recommends and greatly supports the implementation of an ASL program at the University of Nevada, Reno.

We thank you for supporting the needs of our Deaf and hard of hearing community here in Northern Nevada.

*Nevada Aging and Disability Services Division
Interpreter Subcommittee*