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### **SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETER LICENSURE BILL BECOMES LAW**

Governor Ricketts has signed LB 287 into law. LB 287 requires all community interpreters who receive compensation for providing interpreting services to have a license. Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (NCDHH) will issue those licenses. Educational (K-12) and religious interpreters are exempt, with educational interpreter requirements covered under special education regulations, commonly referred to as Rule 51, regulated by the Nebraska Department of Education. Video Remote Interpreter (VRI) providers in the state will also be required to obtain a license.

The purpose of this legislation, sponsored by Sen. Ken Haar, is to ensure proficiency and competency for sign language interpreters providing effective communication access in the community setting. Currently, a license is only required for interpreters practicing within courts, state agencies, and law enforcement.

“The job of ensuring communication access will now be easier with the passage of LB 287. NCDHH will now have the ability to address the proficiency and competency of sign language interpreters that work in the community,” NCDHH Executive Director John Wyvill said. “We are grateful for the support of Senator Haar, members of the Nebraska Unicameral and the Governor for passage of legislation that will allow NCDHH to enhance communication access in Nebraska for all.”

Last year a legislative interim study was organized including a Steering Committee and multiple work groups to discuss ways to improve the quality and availability of interpreter services for Nebraskans. Coordinated by NCDHH, the Steering Committee and work groups met to identify areas of concern, conduct research and give recommendations to address the quality and availability issues.

One of the LB 517 legislative work group recommendations included the need for all community sign language interpreters be licensed in the state of Nebraska, with the exception of religious and educational interpreters.

“As an interpreter, this licensure bill is a way of setting and maintaining high standards for ourselves, which helps us strive for excellence,” NCDHH Interpreter Program Assistant, Crystal Pierce, said. “I wouldn’t go to a doctor that wasn’t licensed, so why shouldn’t the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community have the same expectation with their interpreters.”

With the passage of this bill, it ensures NCDHH to continue to carry out its’ vision as a proactive and reactive state agency: to strive to enhance collaboration by creating support, cooperation and understanding to achieve fairness and equality in all aspects of mainstream for Nebraskans who are Deaf, Deaf-Blind and Hard of Hearing.

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