

Chris Haulmark
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Testimony: HB 2219

I am writing this testimony as a citizen, who happens to be Deaf, to share my perspective as to why SB2219 should be supported and passed.

There are over 48 million Americans with a hearing loss due to hereditary and congenital factors, aging, and, especially, exposure to loud noise. Kansas has slightly over 8% or over 230,000 people with hearing loss which includes individuals who identify as Deaf, Hard of Hearing, Late-Deafened, DeafBlind, and DeafDisabled. Those individuals are able to choose an audiological or cultural perspective. It's all about choices, comfort level, mode of communication, and acceptance.

I am Deaf and disabled citizen who is a resident of Olathe in Kansas. As a bilinguist with American Sign Language (ASL) as my native and primary language and written English as my second language, I do not hear nor to speak in any languages including English.

While the committee meetings are in session, the Kansas Legislature website provides audio streaming channels to the public. As a Deaf citizen of Kansas and a former candidate for Kansas House District 15 in 2018, I was and still am denied the opportunities to access these committee sessions while any other citizens of Kansas are provided those same opportunities.

In looking forward, my hope is that that all legislative sessions and proceedings will be accessible to the Deaf community either through our native language, American Sign Language (ASL), or with the method of using Live Captions. If it is in the language of English via the method of using Live Captions, those Deaf individuals who are fluent in English would be able to read, be aware, and have accessibility.

With the online platform, live audio should have Live Captions in order to provide equity for those who, due to accessibility reasons, physically unable to attend or to obtain in-person sign language interpreters, and would be able to participate at home. I see significant amount of cost savings by using live captioning as opposed to onsite or integrated video of an interpreter on screen. On the same token, I see how having the transcript available can be a huge benefit for those that can hear as well, allowing them access to this information. Just like how the elevators and ramps benefit the walking abled-bodies.

I encourage this bill to be passed so that the Deaf community, a very disenfranchised community, has access to the political processes and as Kansans can be part of making Kansas a better and stronger state. The passage of HB 2219 will allow Deaf people to meet our American ideal of self-determination and individuality as well.

Thank you.

Chris Haulmark