

SB 185 TESTIMONY FROM CHRIS HAULMARK

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Dear Representative Steve Huebert and the House Education Committee:

Thank you very much for welcoming the Deaf community to this important discussion.

I am Chris Haulmark. I am a Deaf¹ community leader who advocates for the Deaf community both within the great state of Kansas and across the nation.

I have lived a lifetime of experience as an individual who has attended public schools, worked as a dishwasher as a teenager, built a successful career to the point where I was a manager for a large IT department, and left my career to fight for civil rights issues as I have been doing in the last decade.

Throughout my life I have encountered numerous sign language interpreters. These interpreters ranged from being unqualified to being extraordinarily qualified.

Not only does my own experience provide this perspective on the field of sign language interpreters, but my large “family” of Deaf people across the nation often share their stories regarding communication barriers, in the hope that together we may be able to provide creative solutions.

As a result of my lifetime experience I’ve come to a conclusion that if every American had learned, acquired, and became fluent in sign language, Deaf people would not experience

¹This label is contrary to the term “hearing impaired” which is generally applied in a demeaning tone to obliterate the personal history, background, cultural abundance, and visual language of this particular member of the Deaf community. The Kansas Legislature has accepted this by lawfully legislating the name change from Kansas Commission for the Deaf and Hearing Impaired to Kansas Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. K.S.A. § 75-5397b (1992).

communication barriers in this nation. This would eliminate the need for sign language interpreters.

On the other hand, it is unfortunate that many people do not learn, master, and become fluent in sign language. We therefore need to ensure the qualified sign language interpreters are available.

I have learned from years of experience that most communication accessibility mistakes are made by those mandated by legislation to provide communication access to the Deaf community. Typically there is confusion regarding how legally-required effective communication is required and how sign language interpreters perform their jobs. In addition to this confusion, Deaf people are frequently misunderstood to be responsible for ensuring communication accessibility for themselves.

KCDHH was established by the Kansas Legislature with the purpose of serving as the legislative link between the state government and the Deaf community. The Deaf community's dedication to making communication accessible for future generations, like myself and other Deaf individuals, has been remarkable in the 1970s and 1980s, long before the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 was enacted.

Not only by a preconceived design the KCDHH is capable for ensuring the public entities of the state government are in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act when it comes to making sure the Deaf individuals are not excluded from their services, programs, and activities offered to the public, it also sets the example by assuring that the entities within the private sector follows the Americans with Disabilities Act.

In my capacity as a concerned citizen, I have been involved with the Kansas Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing for some time. There is always room for improvement when it comes to improving communication accessibility.

I am pleased to learn that the House Education Committee has taken on the responsibility for discussing and voting on this SB 185. This bill is designed to benefit the Deaf community through the strengthening of the KCDHH. As a bonus, it would help protect the Deaf community by requiring the interpreters to undergo some background checks.

Remember that we are frequently in vulnerable situations such as at hospitals, educational settings, senior centers, and psychological sessions. In these circumstances, interpreters would be appearing to interpret for us. Often times, the entities that hired an interpreter do not screen or do background checks on these interpreters to ensure that it is

okay to leave them with a vulnerable Deaf individual such as a Deaf child or a Deaf senior citizen.

Therefore, if the SB 185 passes, KCDHH will be able to put these interpreters through these background checks and to ensure that they can be trusted to be around vulnerable Deaf individuals when they are alone. Furthermore, KCDHH would have the opportunity to evaluate, acquire, and distribute necessary resources to ensure communication accessibility is provided by the entire state government to the Deaf individuals, as required by Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

This testimony is to express my confidence in your vote to pass this bill.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chris Haulmark". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping tail on the final letter.

Chris Haulmark