



January 13, 2014

Washington State House Committee on Education

Re: HB1815 (*“Assuring that education-related information is appropriately provided to parents with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds”*); suggested minor revisions from Washington State’s professional linguists, to ensure effective and high-quality language services in educational system

Dear Legislator:

The Northwest Translators and Interpreters Society (“NOTIS”) represents over 300 professional interpreters and translators in Washington State, Oregon, Montana, Idaho, and Alaska. Our members, who live and work throughout Washington, ensure clear and effective communications in more than 50 languages. We applaud your consideration of bill HB1815, to develop new standards for the provision of interpretation services in educational settings. Because we too support appropriate communication of educational information to limited English proficient families, we write to recommend two minor revisions to protect these families’ interests.

The recommended revisions will ensure the policy is feasible and effective, through language professionals’ participation in the policy development process; and that properly qualified professionals will render these language services.

1. Revision to Section 2(1)

We recommend adding “professional interpreters” after “parents with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds,” so that professional interpreters are included in the group tasked with creating a model language access policy and procedure. Professional interpreters will bring to the table their field experience as language service providers, and will ensure that the policy and procedure are realistic and effective.

The wisdom of including professional interpreters in language services policy-making bodies is underscored by the mandatory inclusion of interpreters in, for example, the Washington State Court Interpreter Commission. See Washington State Courts General Rule 11.1(c) (requiring that the Washington State Court appoint two interpreters to the eleven-member commission).

2. Revisions to Section 2(2) and 2(3)

In addition to proficiency in at least two languages, being an interpreter requires skills, training, and experience. To ensure that educational interpreters are properly qualified to provide high-quality interpreting, rather than simply people with knowledge of two languages, we recommend adding the phrase “properly credentialed or otherwise qualified”:

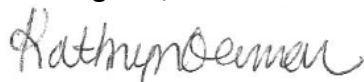
- in Section 2(2)(b), before the word “adult”; and
- in Section 2(3)(b), before the word “bilingual.”

While there is no specific educational interpreter credential in Washington, there are several other interpreter credentials that can offer relevant evidence of an interpreter’s skills. For example, the Washington Department of Social and Health Services certifies social services interpreters in numerous languages. Many school districts currently require DSHS interpreter certification for interpreters working in languages for which this certification is available. Likewise, DSHS offers medical interpreter certification. And the Washington state courts and federal courts also certify interpreters.

Unfortunately, interpreter certification credentials are not available in each of the hundred of languages spoken by parents of Washington students. Therefore we propose inclusion of the “otherwise qualified” phrase, to indicate that schools will still seek the most qualified interpreter available if it is impossible to locate a certified interpreter for a given language pair.

Please feel free to contact me at any time at the below email address with any questions. Again, thank you for your commitment to making crucial educational information accessible to people with limited English proficiency throughout our state.

Best regards,



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President

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