



STATE SENATOR  
**LaTonya Johnson**

WISCONSIN STATE SENATE

6<sup>TH</sup> DISTRICT

**Senate Committee on Public Benefits, Licensing and State-Federal Relations  
Testimony on 2017 Assembly Bill 589  
March 1, 2017**

Chairman Kapenga and members of the committee, thank you for holding a hearing on AB 589.

Assembly Bill 589 makes important changes to Wisconsin's licensing for sign language interpreters to protect those who rely on their services and to ensure high standards for those wishing to provide sign language interpretation.

Sign language interpreters provide critical communication services for the deaf, deaf-blind, and hard of hearing in a wide variety of settings, ranging from community or religious events to legal proceedings and health care visits. While misinterpretation in some settings may only risk a breach of social etiquette, an error or omission in a health care setting could be a matter of life or death for the person relying on the interpreter to convey accurate information.

AB 589 will address shortages by allowing more interpreters to be licensed in the field, while maintaining strong standards for those who wish to provide sign language interpretation in high risk settings.

Earlier this session, this committee heard from members of the sign language interpretation community regarding needed reforms to strengthen their profession, and I am pleased to say that this bipartisan proposal is the result of continued conversations with both providers and consumers of these essential services.

The Legislature owes it to Wisconsinites who rely on sign language interpretation to protect their health, assert their civil rights, and to otherwise meaningfully engage in society to provide clear and effective licensing and enforcement for those who wish to provide these professional services.

Once again, thank you for allowing me to testify today and for your consideration of this bipartisan, common-sense legislation. I would also like to thank Reps. Brostoff, Skowronski, Kleefisch, and Sen. Testin for their work on this bill.



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March 1, 2018

Chairman Kapenga and Committee Members,

Thank you for taking time today to hear the Amended version of AB 589. This sub amendment will accomplish 4 main tasks that are all necessary to keep jobs here in Wisconsin.

Currently there are 4 states that administer the Board for Evaluations of Interpreters (BEI). Wisconsin is not one of them, and that is making it difficult for interpreters to renew their licenses. This bill would require the Department of Health Services to administer the performance examinations of the BEI here in Wisconsin.

This bill will also allow restricted sign language interpreter licenses to be renewed indefinitely. Currently, the law is that restricted licenses can only be renewed twice. This change will be retroactive, and those whose licenses expired in August of 2017 will be able to get their licenses back and get back in the workforce. The Department of Safety and Professional Services DSPS will grant restricted licenses to those who have satisfied all requirements and passed the basic performance exam of the BEI.

DSPS will grant renewable sign language interpreter licenses to those who have finished the requirements and are certified by the BEI.

These 4 items will keep jobs in Wisconsin, and make sure that interpreters do not lose their licenses due to Wisconsin'