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# PATRICK TESTIN

## STATE SENATOR

DATE: June 25<sup>th</sup>, 2019

RE: **Testimony on 2019 Senate Bill 265**

TO: The Senate Committee on Public Benefits, Licensing, and State-Federal Relations

FROM: Senator Patrick Testin

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Thank you to Chairman Kapenga and the members of the committee for hearing my testimony on Senate Bill 265 (SB 265). This bill, which I've authored with Senator Johnson and Representatives Skowronski and Brostoff intends to give greater flexibility to those looking to enter the field of sign language interpreting, as well as providing a stronger voice to members of the Deaf Community.

Most of us have the good fortune to be born with all five senses. It's hard to imagine how being unable to hear would change how we communicate, and how much we would come to rely on another person – an interpreter – to share our thoughts, ideas, emotions, and needs with the broader world.

This legislation was crafted in consultation with the Deaf Community, and changes the sign language interpreter classifications to clarify their responsibilities in accordance with the Community's wishes.

Additionally, this legislation makes changes to reform the current interpreting licensure system, which, though established in 2010 with good intentions, has inadvertently led to the loss of over 100 interpreters in the last year. Statutorily, this system utilizes an examination that has been under a moratorium since 2015. State agencies have implemented emergency rules to accept results from another program, the Board for Evaluation of Interpreters (BEI) performance examination, in an attempt to enable practitioners to remain licensed. Unfortunately, the nearest state where this is currently available is Michigan. Without a statutory change, Wisconsin could lose another 40 interpreters by the end of July. For the Deaf Community, this is much worse than an inconvenience. They are losing their mode of communication.

In addition, current law mandates timeframes in its licensure renewal requirements that have caused qualified interpreters to leave the field. Instead of forcing interpreters to pursue the highest level of training, our bill enables entry level licensees to permanently renew their licenses at that level.

Thank you for your consideration. I hope that you will join me in supporting this bill.



# KEN SKOWRONSKI

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 82<sup>nd</sup> ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

(608) 266-8590  
Toll-Free: (888) 534-0082  
Rep.Skowronski@legis.wi.gov

P.O. Box 8953  
Madison, WI 53708-8953

Tuesday June 25, 2019

Good Morning Chairman Kapenga and committee members,

Thank you for hearing my testimony on SB 265. This legislation is similar to what we worked on last session.

This bill replaces the restricted and the renewable interpreter license with an intermediate and advanced license for both Deaf and Hearing Sign Language Interpreters. Both licenses will be indefinitely renewable, allowing individuals to continue to practice at a level they are comfort with. Currently, to become licensed you must take the Board for Evaluations of Interpreters exam (BEI). Wisconsin does not offer this exam and interpreters must travel to Michigan to take it

Currently, our fiscal is outdated, amendment one moves the examination process from DSPS to DHS, which already has the infrastructure to administer the exam.

Last year over 100 interpreters lost their licenses due to the restrictions. If passed, this bill will help retain 40 jobs that are on the verge of being lost at the end of July and create jobs that are needed across the entire state.

This bill isn't us, it is about the communities that deserve access to communication and to have their voices heard, Correctly.

I want to thank you for hearing our bill today.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Ken".



STATE SENATOR  
**LaTonya Johnson**

WISCONSIN STATE SENATE

6TH DISTRICT

**Senate Committee on Public Benefits, Licensing and State-Federal Relations**  
**Testimony on 2019 Senate Bill 265**  
**June 25, 2019**

Chairman Kapenga and members of the committee, thank you for holding a hearing on SB 265.

Senate Bill 265 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.

SB 265 attempts to codify this spectrum of sign language interpretation services by creating two tiers of qualification for both hearing and deaf interpreters: intermediate and advanced. This 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.

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. SB 265 will advance the profession, provide safeguards for consumers in high risk settings, and ensure a voice for members of the deaf community in determining how their interpreters will be regulated in the future.

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

STATE REPRESENTATIVE  
**JONATHAN BROSTOFF**  
19TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

**Testimony in Support of SB 265**

Relating to: examinations and licensure of sign language interpreters  
June 25, 2019

Chairman Kapenga, Vice-Chairman Craig, and distinguished members of the Senate Committee on Public Benefits, Licensing and State-Federal Relations, I thank you for the opportunity to provide my written testimony in support of Senate Bill 265. I submit this testimony today as a proud co-author of this bill, and as someone who is deeply invested in the safety and success of Wisconsin's Deaf and interpreter communities.

All too often, it is taken for granted that the Deaf community relies on sign language interpreters to communicate with the hearing community, with little thought given to the practical considerations or pitfalls that can result. While most licensed sign language interpreters are entirely qualified to interpret in everyday situations, we have seen the Deaf community underserved in more complicated situations that require interpretation with an advanced degree of expertise and technical knowledge, such as mental health scenarios, legal interactions, or emergency room visits.

SB 265 addresses this by creating appropriate tiers of sign language interpreters, intermediate and advanced, with different requirements and scopes of practice for each. In this way, SB 265 responds to the needs of both the Deaf *and* interpreter communities: it ensures high-quality, advanced interpretation services for deaf individuals in cases where an interpreter with a more advanced level of knowledge or experience in a technical field is necessary, and it ensures that interpreters are not forced into interpretation scenarios for which they feel underqualified or overwhelmed.

Furthermore, SB 265 addresses the examination and license renewal process for interpreters, and will help guarantee that current and aspiring interpreters have access to jobs in their field. SB 265 will lower barriers for new interpreters by increasing access to licensing examinations in Wisconsin, and will protect licenses for current interpreters - absent the provisions in this bill, we have already seen numerous interpreters lose their professional licenses, and several more are under threat of losing their licenses by the end of this summer if we do not act. People in our state *want* to work, and this bill will guarantee them the opportunity to do so.

While working on this legislation, I've also had the opportunity to travel across the state and meet with various stakeholders from rural areas, urban areas, and everywhere in between. Unfortunately, I've had to hear more than enough stories outlining the need for SB 265. From a young woman who, due to a lack of proper interpreting services in the hospital, had the wrong surgery performed on her, to a deaf couple going through a divorce who, again, due to a lack of proper interpreting services in the courtroom, experienced a significant mistake in their custody and visitation rights - it is time for this legislation.

SB 265 is the result of years of work across the aisle to benefit the Deaf community in Wisconsin, and has earned broad bipartisan support in our State, most recently evidenced by last week's unanimous vote on passage of the companion bill to SB 265 in the Assembly. I want to sincerely thank Senator Testin, Senator Johnson, Representative Skowronski, Representative Thiesfeldt, former Representative Kleefisch, the Wisconsin Association for the Deaf, the Wisconsin Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, and the numerous other individuals who have worked on or touched this legislation in some way for their work - each of us, in our own way, has put a lot of work into this and I am honored and blessed to have worked with such a fine group on such an important bill. This bill is the outcome of the best potential of bipartisan work being realized in politics.

I urge the members of the Committee to vote yes on SB 265, and to show your support for the Deaf and interpreter communities in our great State. Thank you for your time and consideration.