

Granholt Signs Laws Expanding Rights of Deaf & Hard of Hearing *Qualified Interpreters Now Required in All Circumstances Specified by Americans with Disabilities Act*

June 29, 2007 - LANSING - Governor Jennifer M. Granholt signed legislation that requires the use of qualified sign language interpreters who possess state or national certification in all accommodations required under the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), making the scope of Michigan's law comparable to the federal law. Approximately 1.4 million Michigan citizens are deaf or hard of hearing.

"We're ending the confusion, frustration, and errors that are so often experienced by the deaf and hard of hearing in important life situations due to misinterpreted information," said Granholt. "Equal access to accurate communication is a basic civil right of us all."

Under Public Act 23 (Senate Bill 25) and Public Act 24 (House Bill 4208) employers, state and local governments, and businesses providing a variety of services to the public are now obligated to provide for effective communication. Such entities include public and private schools and colleges; doctors' offices, hospitals and pharmacies; banks, hotels, restaurants and theatres. Reasonable notice is required if a qualified interpreter is needed.

PAs 23 and 24 amend the Deaf Persons' Interpreters Act (PA 204 of 1982) which limited the application of interpreter standards to court and administrative hearings and was not sufficiently clear on the standards. PA 23 now defines a "qualified" interpreter as a person who is certified through the National Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf or by the Division of Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DODHH) in the Department of Labor & Economic Growth (DLEG).

"I'm pleased to sign legislation that sets universal standards of excellence for qualified interpreters and protects our citizens from unqualified practitioners," Granholt said.

If an entity willfully fails to provide an interpreter when one is required or an unqualified interpreter is provided, the business or entity may be subject to a civil fine. Individuals who misrepresent themselves as qualified interpreters would be guilty of a misdemeanor and punishable by imprisonment and/or a fine. Individuals who violate the law are subject to rejection of their application for certification, or revocation, suspension, or limitation of certification.

PA 24 grants rulemaking authority to the DODHH, including establishing rules on minimum credential requirements and levels, minimum standards of practice, and continuing education. Rules must be coordinated with the Michigan Department of Education and the Michigan Administrative Rules for Special Education for the purpose of increasing interpreter qualifications, improving educational services to deaf and hard of hearing students, increasing the supply of qualified interpreters by promoting interpreting as a profession, and increasing the number of training programs.

Michigan becomes one of only a few states to recognize the interpreting field for the skills and credentials it requires and make qualified interpreters mandatory in a broader

range of situations. These factors serve the state well in attracting qualified interpreters to Michigan as well as training more people who want to become interpreters.

“This brings significant job growth opportunities to the state,” said Keith W. Cooley, director of DLEG. “We’re already in short supply of qualified interpreters and the demand for services is growing.”

According to a 2006 study “Supply & Demand for Interpreters for the Deaf in Michigan” conducted by Public Policy Associates, Inc., in consultation with DODHH and the Michigan Department of Education (available online at www.mcdc-dodhh.org) the demand for interpreters will grow over the next 25 years and it will take 15-20 years to close the gap between the supply and demand of interpreters. Factors contributing to the demand include: the aging of the deaf and hard of hearing population; the growing need for interpreters in health care settings; expansion of video relay service (VRS) and other new communication services for the deaf and hard of hearing; and the impact of the No Child Left Behind Act, the ADA, and the Educational Interpreters Proficiency Assessment guidelines.

To meet the demand, interpreters in the future will need to be better educated, possess more specialized skills, and will be required to meet more stringent certification criteria. The study found that 30 percent of interpreters in Michigan are not certified at all.

Currently there are approximately 531 state or nationally certified interpreters in Michigan; 450 state certified interpreters are eligible to renew certification this year. Interpreters who possess Michigan Quality Assurance Certification at levels, I, II, or III are considered qualified until that certification status expires. Such a certificate may be renewed annually until it expires and retesting is required. Interpreters who currently hold national certification recognized by DODHH must be issued a state certification upon filing a completed application and paying applicable fees.

Senate Bill 25 and identical bill, House Bill 4208 were sponsored by Senator John Gleason (District 27, Genesee County) and Representative Dudley Spade (District 57, Lenawee County) respectively.

Contact: Janet Jurus, State Interpreter, DODHH: (517) 335-6004 Voice/TTY; or (877) 499-6232 Voice/TTY/F toll free. Visit the DODHH website at www.mcdc-dodhh.org. To view PA 23 and PA 24 go to www.michiganlegislature.org .

###