



WISCONSIN LEGISLATURE

P.O. BOX 8952 • MADISON, WI 53708

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Contact: Rep. Jonathan Brostoff, (608) 266-0650

Rep. Skowronski, (608) 266-8590

Rep. Kleefisch, (608) 266-8551

Sen. Testin, (608) 266-3123

Public Demonstrates Strong Support for Sign Language Interpreter's Bill

MADISON – Yesterday, Assembly Bill (AB) 589, authored by State Senator Patrick Testin (R-Stevens Point), Representatives Jonathan Brostoff (D-Milwaukee), Joel Kleefisch (R- Oconomowoc), and Ken Skowronski (R-Franklin) received a public hearing in the Assembly Committee on Jobs and the Economy. AB 589 would restructure the current system for licensing sign language interpreters to create qualification levels to allow more interpreters to gain employment faster, while providing consumer protections. It will also create the Sign Language Interpreter's Examining Board in order to periodically identify if updates are needed. Around 50 supporters of the bill from across the state traveled to the Capitol to testify in favor of it, including a group of 17 UW-Milwaukee Interpreter Training students directly affected by the bill. More Wisconsinites sent written testimony ahead of the hearing and 32 registered in support. Three hundred people were tuned in online.

“The deaf community has sent a message. They feel that their voice has been silenced. We can't let that happen,” said Sen. Testin. “This bill will help more interpreters enter the job market while ensuring that only the most qualified interpreters are working in high risk medical or legal situations. Moreover, it enables members of the deaf community to better communicate any questions or concerns that they have with practitioners. It's a win for interpreters and the communities that count on them to be their voice.”

“Current Wisconsin law and licensure regulations have created a perfect storm for our deaf, deaf-blind, and hard-of-hearing neighbors: A serious shortage of experienced interpreters at the same time that rookie interpreters just out of school are allowed to interpret complex medical procedures, psychiatric appointments and legal court proceedings. AB 589 will raise the quality and standard of services by appropriately placing an interpreter in environments best suited to his or her skill level,” said Rep. Brostoff. “This is simply about accountability, accessibility, and getting people back to work.

“Making sure the deaf and hard of hearing have legitimate representation in legal and medical cases is a top priority for me,” said Rep Kleefisch. “People's lives are at stake.”

“Nobody knows and understands the needs of the community better than consumers themselves, said Rep. Skowronski. “That is why working to draft this legislation with organizations such as Wisconsin Association of the Deaf and Wisconsin Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf was so key. I am proud to be an author of this legislation.”

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