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The Honourable Liz Sandals
Minister of Education
Mowat Block
22nd Floor
900 Bay Street
Toronto, Ontario
M7A 1L2

March 5, 2013

Dear Ms. Sandals,

Re: Quality of Education for Deaf Students in Mainstreamed Schools

The Durham Deaf Accessibility Committee was established five years ago with our main focus being advocacy for improved accessibility for the Deaf community in the Durham Region in Ontario. One of our current priorities is to advocate for better accessibility for Deaf children using American Sign Language in mainstreamed schools in our area.

Interpreters with subpar skills that are often hired by school boards have a detrimental life-long impact on Deaf students if they are not able to access the education they need in order to succeed in their educational and vocational careers. We are aware that there is a widespread concern about the skills of sign language interpreters hired by school boards across the province.

There is the urgent need to regulate the sign language interpreter profession and there had been past attempts to pass a bill to establish a college of sign language interpreters but in the past, this has not been successful. Much effort has been put in the regulating and monitoring of education for all our children and failing to regulate the quality of sign language interpreters makes ensuring that Deaf children are receiving a proper education in mainstreamed schools a moot point. It is akin to hiring teachers who have undertaken nothing more than French classes in high school to teach children whom native language is French and expect those children to be successful in school.

We are asking you to look into the issue of regulating and screening the technical skills of interpreters to work with Deaf children using American Sign Language in the mainstreamed school environment. An interpreter is different from an educational assistant who can sign. A signing educational assistant does not have the skill or training to completely interpret everything that is being spoken in the classroom.

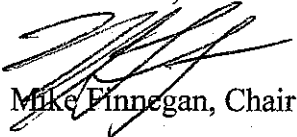
We are also asking that the Ministry of Education create a position for an expert to guide, monitor and ensure that mainstreamed educational interpreters in the province are

appropriately providing accurate language translation for Deaf children using American Sign Language in the mainstreamed environment so they could receive the best possible education they have the right to have. This means finding a person with professional and empirical knowledge about interpreting and education. Currently, there is a lack of provincial coordination and school boards with limited knowledge and understanding of the interpreting profession are left without adequate support in trying to accommodate these students' needs.

Would it be possible for you to work with the Ontario Association of Sign Language Interpreters (OASLI) and the Association of Visual Sign Language Interpreters of Canada (AVLIC) to address the gaps that is impacting the quality of mainstreamed education for Deaf students in Ontario? We feel this issue has long been overlooked, is crucial and should not be ignored.

We look forward to receiving a response from you discussing measures that needs to be undertaken on this important issue.

With thanks,



Mike Finnegan, Chair

cc: Durham Deaf Accessibility Committee – Don Kinsley, Veronica Bickle, Gordon Ryall, Beverley Dooley, Kim Reid, Mirek Swiecicki, Behishta Mushtaq, Bryan Meany and Robert Lang.

cc: Maggie Doherty-Gilbert, Regional Director, The Canadian Hearing Society, Peterborough, York, Durham and City of Kawartha Lakes Regions

cc: Gary Malkowski, Special Advisor to the CEO, The Canadian Hearing Society

cc: Chris Kenopic, President and CEO, The Canadian Hearing Society

cc: Courtney Cockburn, President, Ontario Association of Sign Language Interpreters

cc: Wayne Nicholson, President, Ontario Association of the Deaf

cc: Dean Walker, Executive Director, Ontario Association of the Deaf

cc: Phyllis Beaton-Vazquez, ASL-English Interpreter Program Coordinator, George Brown College

cc: Peggy Allen, Chief Speech-Language Pathologist, Durham District School Board

cc: Doug Crichton, Superintendent of Special Education, Durham District School Board

cc: Christine Elliott, MPP – Oshawa-Whitby

cc: Jerry Ouellette, MPP – Oshawa

cc: Laurie Scott, MPP – Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock

cc: John O'Toole, MPP – Durham

cc: Joe Dickson, MPP – Ajax-Pickering

cc: Tracy MacCharles, MPP – Pickering-Scarborough East