



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF THE DEAF

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April 23, 2003

The Honorable Rick Perry
Office of the Governor
P.O. Box 12428
Austin, TX 78711-2425

Dear Governor Perry:

I am writing on behalf of the National Association of the Deaf (NAD) and its Board of Directors to express grave concerns about recent events that affect the quality of life of deaf and hard of hearing people residing in Texas.

Established in 1880, the NAD is nation's the oldest and largest consumer-based national advocacy organization safeguarding the civil and accessibility rights of deaf and hard of hearing individuals in the United States of America. Policy and legislative issues addressed by the NAD cover a broad range of areas, including education, employment, health care, human services, rehabilitation, telecommunications, technology and transportation. The NAD is also a federation of 51 state association affiliates, including the District of Columbia, and direct members. Together with its membership and affiliate organizations, the NAD effects positive change throughout the country, breaking down barriers on all fronts.

It is our understanding that HB 2292, a state bill that proposes to merge the Texas Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (TCDHH) with other state agencies under the state department of Health and Human Services. While the cross-disability approach has its merits, such benefits do not extend to the constituencies served by TCDHH. Deaf and hard of hearing constituents require direct programs and services delivery that is geared specifically to their unique communication and language needs. These individuals also experience communication barriers as opposed to physical barriers, which in turn represents a very different and unique need for services and access. There is a wealth of common knowledge, research findings, and report recommendations to the effect that deaf and hard of hearing persons have very different needs from other individuals with disabilities. Because of the specialized needs of deaf and hard of hearing persons, a single office that is cross-disability in nature simply cannot adequately the needs of this particular community.

TCDHH was established in 1971 at the request of the deaf community because services appropriate to their needs were either few or entirely non-existent. This move established the first and what was to become one of the finest commissions serving the deaf in the nation. Many states have followed the Texas model. In 1991, services for hard of hearing constituents were added. With today's advanced medical technologies, residents of Texas have a longer life expectancy, and age is one of the leading causes of hearing loss in the older population.

The many services provided by TCDHH includes a state-based interpreter certification program (BEI) and the Specialized Telecommunications Assistance Program (STAP). TCDHH also contracts with 23 local service councils, which in turn provide interpreter services.

The state also has 11 Regional Specialist offices, which provide advocacy, information and referral, training, assistance and many other services through direct contact with deaf and hard of hearing constituents, as well as local and state entities. All of the above make it possible for TCDHH to maintain extensive outreach networks in all diverse communities within their service arena. TCDHH also provides a Senior Citizen program, a Camp Sign program, CART services, Certification of Deafness for tuition waivers, interagency training and workshops. Topics for the latter include communication access, 911 emergency call center training, consumer rights under the ADA, parent training, and much more. Under a cross-disability structure, many of these services would effectively disappear, and deaf and hard of hearing constituents would suffer needlessly as a result

I want to reiterate the importance and leadership role of TCDHH. Fully two-thirds of the nation's states have state commissions or agencies dedicated to serving deaf and hard of hearing individuals and their families. These states, including Texas, have risen to the challenge of addressing the distinctive communication and service needs of deaf and hard of hearing constituents.

In closing, I urge you to not to turn deaf ears to the very community with whom the TCDHH works closely in their commitment to providing accessibility and quality programs and services, in a manner that meets their needs for direct and barrier-free communication. I urge you to take a hard look at the key role and significance of state commissions serving deaf and hard of hearing persons. Further, I urge you to retain the current stature of TCDHH within the state government structure.

Thank you for your time and interest in considering this request.



Nancy J. Bloch
Executive Director

cc: Board of Directors, National Association of the Deaf
Board of Directors, Texas Association of the Deaf