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RID Government Affairs Representative**

Representing an entire association of diverse thinkers can be a daunting and sometimes overwhelming task. However, by working together it is our goal to create a program that can represent our positions and perspectives and ensure that RID has a greater presence on the state and federal levels regarding issues impacting the professional sign language interpreting field.

The founding purpose of RID points to standards; standards in a profession that aims to provide equal communication access are essential and cannot be compromised. This overarching purpose of RID has credence today more than ever. Throughout our 45+ year history, RID's mission has always been to support the membership, the profession and the Deaf community that we serve.

Through RID's National Certification Program, Certification Maintenance Program and Ethical Practices System we, as an association, have established and publicized industry standards for quality services, for continuing education, for ethical conduct and for safe working conditions for our interpreters.

The creation of the RID Government Affairs Program (GAP) is another measure of that support. GAP will be focusing on the education and advocacy of those standards at the local, state and federal level; with business and consumers; with administrators and regulators.

When we started there were already many areas spotlighted as requiring GAP attention. Some were ongoing, long-standing issues that require thought, strategic planning and collaboration, while others began to pop up quickly and required immediate attention and action.

As the first RID GAP Representative, my goal is to work within the RID structures and throughout our membership to identify and prioritize issues and set a meaningful agenda as we move to bridge the "gaps" that exist between interpreters and those who make decisions that affect the interpreting field. While there is no shortage of hot issues that demand our attention, we want to spend adequate time analyzing and planning our first year agenda.

Survey Responses

In January we conducted the 2010 GAP Survey in which we asked for member input regarding the three main categories we identified for government affairs activities: certification and standards; interpreter advocacy and protection and provision of service. 272 members responded to the survey. The data is currently being more fully analyzed, but we can provide a summary of some of the more noted points gleaned from the responses. (NOTE: these are in no weighted order): state licensure, strengthening affiliate chapters, FCC voice, certification levels, standards in educational settings, occupational safety, credential-based pay, education and advocacy with other professions and collaboration with the NAD.

We also asked questions about member perspectives on the three categories and what issues GAP should focus. We also received some generic comments such as, "How will this position work with affiliate chapters who face more pressing issues impacting the local constituents?" This is an excellent question because many of you have been working diligently at the state and federal level advocating for the interpreting

field. We respect that and do not want to supersede any current efforts, but rather, we want to learn from you and work with you to enhance the efforts that ultimately elevate the positions and perspectives that support the interpreting profession.

It is our practice to work with individuals, member sections, affiliate chapters, the national office staff and the board of directors. No one person can do this job, it is definitely a team effort; but one that needs to be done. The interpreter voice is missing from too many discussions. How that voice is informed and articulated requires that we all work together.

From the e-mails and calls from our members to the invitations from outside groups, professional organizations, consumer groups, industry partners and government agencies, it is clear to me that there is an enormous need for GAP. More importantly, it is clear to me that these groups are willing to listen.

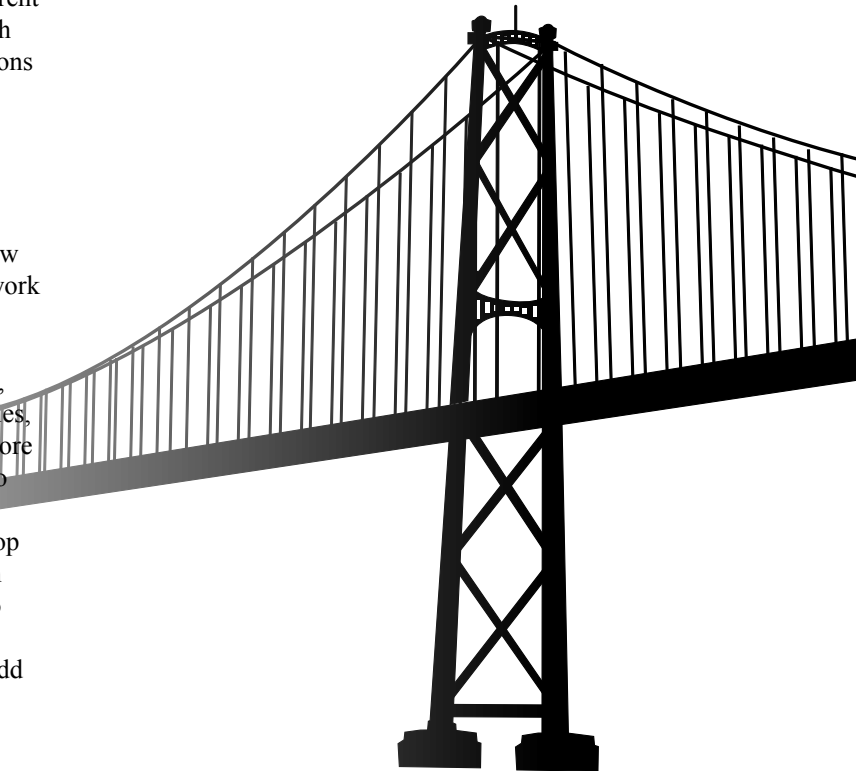
During my first weeks on the job, I attended a workshop sponsored by the Federal Communications Commission on video relay service (VRS) reform. It was too early for us to have asked to be included on their panel, but as I sat in the audience, there were many times I would have wanted to add comments. The time has come for us to make sure that our perspective is shared.

I have been busy representing RID and offering the interpreter perspective at various meetings. It has been a pleasure being welcomed at the table with groups like the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Consumer Advocacy Network (DHHCAN), the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Alliance (DHHA) and the National Emergency Number Association (NENA). Working with old and new friends on issues that affect both the Deaf and interpreter communities has been a tremendous opportunity for RID to have our voice heard.

For many years, interpreters have stood side-by-side with deaf and hard of hearing persons as they fought for their civil rights. We have supported the goals of the Deaf community and rejoiced in the many accomplishments they have made. In recent years, however, we have been seen less as allies, advocates or partners and more as the *labor* in the telecommunications industry. Representing RID on these and other organizations will assure that we will continue to strengthen the important relationships that we have always valued.

A good example of looking for membership input was a recent (and last minute) request from NENA to assist in planning for a meeting that was held in Nashville, TN from February 7 - 10. They reached out to RID to assure that they had input from video interpreters to better understand our needs when dealing with 911 calls and any standards that they would be discussing. The Video Interpreting Members Section, the Video Interpreting Task Force and many individual video interpreters have been a tremendous resource. It is difficult to predict when such a task will require this type of consultation.

During my first few months in this position I have been supported by a tremendous team in the national office, and by many individuals and groups who have been willing to



share information, perspectives and insights that have and will continue to help us make informed decisions. I want to thank each of you.

We will be looking for more advisors willing to assist in various specialty areas like VRS. We will be looking for content experts when we need to tap into the collective wisdom on a variety of subjects. When needed, GAP will send out an e-mail announcement to solicit individual members interested in assisting us on topics that would include VRS, 911 issues, video remote interpreting and educational interpreting. There is no doubt that there will be more issues and more topics, but this is exactly why we will want to have content experts to assist. If you might be interested in serving as a content expert please let us know by sending an e-mail of interest to govtaffairs@rid.org.

We will be in touch soon to update you on GAP activities and to share a more formal analysis of the results of the survey. But don't wait for us, if there is an issue happening in your state that needs GAP attention, please let us know immediately. We are looking forward to working with you all as RID travels down the GAP path.

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