

# It Takes an Association to Do the Work of GAP

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## State Licensure Updates

### Michigan

In April, I traveled to Michigan for a meeting with the Director of the Division on Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Sheryl D. Emery. After an initial introductory meeting, an expanded group met which included the RID Board of Directors Secretary and Michigan interpreter Kelly Flores as well as members of the Michigan Rules Committee. Everyone agreed that we all share a common purpose—to assure the highest quality services for deaf and hard of hearing consumers in Michigan.

The meeting was very productive. RID offered an apology for any unintended offense taken by Ms. Emery or the division for the letter sent in January on behalf of the RID membership. RID assured her that the letter was sent to inform the Michigan officials of the deep concerns being expressed by Michigan interpreters and to open a dialogue in hopes of finding a way to work together now and in the future. Ms. Emery appreciated the spirit of our apology and

offered information about the Michigan process, her timelines and their intended outcomes. While no final determinations were made, it was clear that the two organizations have a much better understanding of the issues and a common purpose to find the best possible outcome.

### Wisconsin

Wisconsin passed a licensure law on April 21 that was signed by the governor on May 13. An amendment, which was offered but not accepted, would have allowed interpreters with state educational credentials to be eligible to provide community services. We heard from members on both sides of this issue; some believed that rural Wisconsin residents would be adversely affected by limiting their educational interpreters from providing services to the same people they work with every day in school, while others believed it would have given too much authority for educational interpreters to be in the community without the necessary skill development. As with most political issues there are good points to be made on both sides.

### Washington, DC

The District of Columbia is currently looking at legislation to develop regulations for sign language interpreters working within the boundaries of our nation's capital. RID has been asked to participate in the work group in the research and development process. We will have more to report as work gets underway in this area.

Whether at the federal or state level, it takes a long time to pass legislation. It can take even longer to amend it. As more states adopt laws regulating interpreting service it behooves us, as an association, to learn from one another. GAP has asked RID's affiliate chapters to send us information on their current state requirements and interpreting licensure laws. RID will gather this information, post it on our Web site and share lessons learned and tips from those who have worked long and hard on the process in the individual states.

Whether you are an individual member or an affiliate chapter officer, please share any information you have as soon as possible. GAP will begin to compare

and contrast the various laws (and their related regulations) and share that information with the membership. We will also work with experts who can counsel us as we analyze the current laws.

### Federal Communications Commission (FCC)

In April, RID met with FCC staff to emphasize the importance of incorporating the interpreter's perspective in video relay service (VRS) policy-making. Successful interpretations are key in measuring true functional equivalence for deaf and hard of hearing callers. We also stressed that our members feel they have been marginalized and largely ignored in the process of establishing the VRS system. During our meeting we made the following recommendations:

- Providers establish methods and strategies to monitor and enforce VRS reform regulations *without* including the interpreters as "police."
- Whistleblower rules be established and shared with providers and interpreters through the workplace and through RID. We also asked that the FCC provide interpreters direct and clear guidelines regarding appropriate and reimbursable calls.
- FCC requirements for providers to ensure the consumer's right to qualified interpreters by establishing standards for certification for the industry's Communication Assistants (CA) workforce.
- FCC to require that rate reductions not adversely affect CAs safe working conditions.
- Any new rate structure considers costs related to orientation and ongoing skills training for interpreters. Training and professional development are essential elements to the overall success of assuring that VRS provides functional equivalence.
- Establish standard operating procedures for E911 services that would assure that all interpreters handling emergency calls hold the highest credentials and be provided in-depth training and effective employee assistance support.

- Point-to-point calls or Deaf-to-hearing signers (10 digit numbering) be available to the deaf and hard of hearing citizens wishing to have direct telephone communications with hearing family, friends, service providers, government offices and interpreting agencies.

As previously distributed to the members, RID also submitted comments and reply comments (May 2010) related to the proposed structure for VRS rate reimbursement. RID focused our comments from the perspective that functional equivalence entails an investment of resources in the video interpreters workforce through continuing education and professional development as well as addressing occupational safety issues.

RID is currently researching best practices for VRS occupational safety in the areas of utilization and occupancy rates. If you have recommendations, please send them to us at [govtaffairs@rid.org](mailto:govtaffairs@rid.org).

To access up-to-date information about GAP, including copies of comments and other pertinent information, please visit us on the RID Web site at <http://www.rid.org/interpreting/index.cfm/AID/177>.

### From the Membership

On May 15, I moderated an all-day workshop for Minnesota RID titled, "State of Interpreting 2010: Where Do We Go from Here?" Participants looked at local and national trends and their effects on our profession and ended the day-long process by looking forward to local needs and strategies.

On May 25, Tina Schultz, Director of Communications, presented a session at the Gallaudet University National Symposium on Video Interpreting: The State of the Practice and Implications titled, "VRS and VRI: Development of the RID Standard Practice Papers (SPPs)." Joining in the panel presentation were members of the former Video Interpreting Committee and Video Interpreting Task Force: Yoshiko "Koko" Chino, Mary Kay Adams and Gino Gouby. It was a chance for the panel to discuss the role of the SPPs as well as their development process and

their implications in the field. Additionally and more importantly, the session provided attendees, which totaled near 100, the opportunity to share concerns, comments and feedback that will prove valuable in the work of GAP as well as the organization as a whole. Overall, the two-day symposium provided multiple presentations on research in the field of VRS and VRI. Discussions regarding the implications of this research ensued and dialogue offered an invaluable opportunity for all participants related to this ever-growing industry. It was clear that more and continued research is needed in the field to further the knowledge on the implications and impact of video interpreting on both the Deaf and interpreter communities.

I will be hosting a GAP forum at all of this summer's region conferences so please join me for a thought-provoking and opinion-sharing meeting of the minds. Look for more programming materials and schedule times from each of the 2010 region conference planners! ■



*Janet is RID's first Government Affairs Representative. Janet worked for the NAD and Gallaudet University before becoming a professional interpreter. An interpreter for over 30 years, Janet*

*has worked in every possible setting; in both federal and private sectors, from hospitals, classrooms to courtrooms and conferences; as well as in her specialty area as a performing arts interpreter. In 1982, Janet became co-founder, President and CEO of the first interpreting business, Sign Language Associates, Inc. (SLA). Ms. Bailey served two terms as President of RID (1991-1995). As an interpreter, a businesswoman, a professional leader, a speaker and an instructor, Janet represents the best practices of the field.*

**Please share your legislative and regulatory issues and concerns by e-mailing [govtaffairs@rid.org](mailto:govtaffairs@rid.org)**