

OFFICE FOR THE DEAF AND HEARING IMPAIRED - ESTABLISHMENT**Act of Dec. 16, 1986, P.L. 1621, No. 184****Cl. 43**

AN ACT

Establishing and imposing powers and duties on the Office for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in the Department of Labor and Industry; and establishing and providing powers and duties for the Advisory Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in the Department of Labor and Industry. (Title amended June 25, 1997, P.L.334, No.37)

The General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania hereby enacts as follows:

Section 1. Legislative findings.

(a) Acknowledgment.--The General Assembly acknowledges the lack of coordination of services for the handicapped in this Commonwealth and supports the concept of a State Commission for the Handicapped to coordinate service delivery and to increase access to services for all handicapped citizens. The development of such a concept currently is under legislative study.

(b) Immediate need.--Notwithstanding the support of a State Commission for the Handicapped, the General Assembly finds an immediate need to create an Office for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing to address the specific needs of this population because:

(1) Public services to deaf persons, such as medical services, mental health services, social services, welfare services, employment services, legal services, etc., are often inaccessible, fragmented and of poor quality due to communication barriers.

(2) These problems can be addressed by providing a special focus on services for the deaf and hard of hearing by implementing and coordinating communication assistance, training, information and referral services for those with hearing handicaps and for those who provide services to the hard of hearing.

(3) It has been estimated that approximately 82,000 deaf and 244,000 hard of hearing persons reside in Pennsylvania. Since 1971, 22 states have legislatively established a commission, office, council or board for the deaf and hard of hearing.

(c) Intent.--It is the intent of the General Assembly that the Advisory Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing and the Office for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing established pursuant hereto become integral units of the State Commission for the Handicapped when such commission is established by the General Assembly.

(1 amended June 25, 1997, P.L.334, No.37)

Section 2. Office established.

(a) Office.--There is established within the Department of Labor and Industry an Office for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing.

(b) Director.--The Secretary of Labor and Industry, on recommendation of the Advisory Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, shall appoint a qualified individual as the Director of the Office for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. The director shall, in turn, appoint such other staff, with the approval of the Secretary of Labor and Industry, as necessary to carry out the functions of the office.

(2 amended June 25, 1997, P.L.334, No.37)

Section 3. Powers and duties of the office.

The Office for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, with the advice of the Advisory Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, and as directed by the Secretary of Labor and Industry, shall:

in turn, appoint such other staff, with the approval of the Secretary of Labor and Industry, as necessary to carry out the functions of the office.

(2 amended June 25, 1997, P.L.334, No.37)

Section 3. Powers and duties of the office.

The Office for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, with the advice of the Advisory Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, and as directed by the Secretary of Labor and Industry, shall:

- (1) Advocate and promote the accessibility to all governmental services to deaf and hard of hearing citizens in this Commonwealth, including those with multiple disabilities.
- (2) Advocate and promote the establishment of a directory of agencies, both public and private, which provide community services, evaluate the extent to which they make services available to deaf and hard of hearing people, and cooperate with the agencies in coordinating and extending these services.
- (3) Advocate and promote the establishment of regional service centers for the deaf and hard of hearing.
- (4) Advocate and promote the mutual exchange of ideas and information on services for deaf and hard of hearing people among Federal, State and local governmental agencies and private organizations.
- (5) Advocate and promote the use of qualified interpreters for the deaf and hard of hearing.
- (6) Collect, systematize and make available for other agencies information in regard to deaf persons and other persons who are hard of hearing in this Commonwealth, including their numbers and characteristics, such as the nature, causes and severity of their hearing losses, their educational and economic status, and any other relevant information.
- (7) Maintain a listing of persons qualified in various types of interpreting for deaf and hard of hearing persons and make this information available to local, State, Federal and private agencies.
- (8) Act as a source of information for the deaf and hard of hearing to State agencies and public institutions providing services to the deaf and hard of hearing and to local agencies and programs.
- (9) The Office for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing shall act as an advocate for and promote the interests of the deaf and hard of hearing before any department, division, board, bureau, commission or agency of the Commonwealth, or of any political subdivision thereof, as might be needed to enable it to properly carry out its activities under this section.
- (10) Perform the duties and responsibilities outlined in this section only to the extent that they do not conflict with or duplicate services currently provided by the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation.

(3 amended June 25, 1997, P.L.334, No.37)

Section 4. Establishment of regional service centers.

(a) Plan for regional services.--Within two years of the effective date of this act, the Director of the Office for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing shall, based on recommendations by the Advisory Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, develop a plan for implementing regional services for the hard of hearing in accordance with the guidelines expressed in this section.

(b) Purpose of regional offices.--The purpose of the regional offices for the hard of hearing shall be to:

- (1) Inform deaf and other hard of hearing persons and their families of services offered locally and elsewhere and to coordinate their referral to the appropriate public or private agencies.
- (2) Coordinate communication between deaf and other hard of hearing persons and the desired agencies or organizations and to promote the accessibility of community services to hard of hearing persons.