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January 26, 2018

Mr. Robert V. O'Brien, Executive Deputy Secretary
Mr. William L. Trusky, Jr., Legislative Director
Office of Labor & Industry
651 Boas Street, Room 1700
Harrisburg, PA 17121

Dear Mr. O'Brien and Mr. Trusky:

Thank you so much for meeting with me on Friday, January 19. It was a pleasure to meet you both. The opportunity to talk with you about our organization – Pennsylvania Society for the Advancement of the Deaf (PSAD) – is very much appreciated. PSAD was founded in 1881 and represents approximately two thousand (2000) deaf and hard of hearing members in the Commonwealth.

As we already reviewed, PSAD has concerns about the current structure of the Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (ODHH). When ODHH was first established by the advocacy of PSAD, it was never intended to be under the purview of the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR). Please see Act 184 which established ODHH in 1986:

http://www.legis.state.pa.us/cfdocs/legis/li/uconsCheck.cfm?yr=1986&sessInd=0&act=184&mobile_choice=suppress. The Act was amended in 1997 in which it was

clear that the duties and responsibilities of ODHH shall not conflict with or duplicate services provided by OVR:

<http://www.legis.state.pa.us/cfdocs/legis/li/uconsCheck.cfm?yr=1997&sessInd=0&act=37>.

OVR's primary mission is employment for people with disabilities. As we discussed, ODHH must serve deaf and hard of hearing people across a broad range of issues from early intervention to education to mental health care to emergency preparedness to nursing care and more. From a logical standpoint, it does not make sense for ODHH to be under an agency whose mission is employment.

Additionally, PSAD remains concerned about how the search for the ODHH Director has been conducted. There are concerns that the search did not include a requirement of standards of fluency in American Sign Language (ASL). The search did not have meaningful, consistent involvement of key community stakeholders. To date, PSAD still does not have official knowledge of the candidates for Director. Community stakeholders and their input are a critical part of the process in an ideal selection of a candidate for this position.

PSAD wishes to stress that any candidate for the Director position must have either an Advanced Plus or 4+ rating on the American Sign Language Proficiency Interview (ASLPI) or the Sign Language Proficiency Interview (SLPI). ASL is a core value of our community. The ASLPI and SLPI are both neutral measurement tools to prove fluency. In addition, the candidate must have a background of working in the field of deafness. As explained in our meeting, a history of working in the disability community is not necessarily demonstrative of knowledge of the deaf and hard of hearing community.

As President, I look forward to continuing our working relationship. Again, I appreciate you taking the time to listen to our concerns and taking them under consideration. It is my hope that we can meet again and establish a more solid partnership. Please always feel free to reach me via email at psadlizhill@gmail.com or call at 267-331-4378.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Hill, President

cc: PSAD Board of Managers
PSAD Membership