TESTIMONY OF
PENNY VAILLANCOURT, DIRECTOR

OFFICE OF PROFESSIONAL AND OCCUPATIONAL REGULATION

DEPARTMENT OF PROFESSIONAL AND FINANCIAL REGULATION
IN SUPPORT OF LD 2087

"AN ACT TO AMEND THE LAWS GOVERNING THE LICENSURE OF AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETERS"

BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON
HEALTH COVERAGE, INSURANCE AND FINANCIAL SERVICES

PUBLIC HEARING: WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 28, 2026 AT 10:00 AM

Senator Bailey, Representative Mathieson, and Members of the Committee, I am Penny Vaillancourt, Director of the Office of Professional and Occupational Regulation ("OPOR"). OPOR has 38 licensing boards and programs, including the American Sign Language Interpreters ("the Program"). Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of OPOR regarding LD 2087.

The Program's sole statutory purpose is to protect the public and it does so by identifying minimum standards for licensure, investigating allegations of unprofessional or incompetent practice and imposing discipline when deemed appropriate. Currently, there are 155 actively licensed American Sign Language Interpreters in the following licensure categories below:

- 15 Conditional Interpreter
- 88 Certified Interpreter
- 44 Limited Interpreter
- 0 Conditional Deaf Interpreter
- 6 Certified Deaf Interpreter
- 2 Limited Deaf Interpreter

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Before identifying the technical components of this legislation, it is important for me to share with the Committee that in the wake of the October 2023 Lewiston shooting, DHHS led an initiative to understand American Sign Language interpreting services in Maine. LD 2087 reflects recommendations from the initiative's report, Transforming Interpreting Maine (TIME), which seeks to address ASL interpreter workforce shortages. The recommended changes are to add an additional educational pathway to licensure, extend the conditional licensure period, and expand the exemptions to licensure.

Specifically, LD 2087 proposes to amend the educational qualifications for licensure to include degrees earned in fields other than American Sign Language or deaf interpreters. It is not anticipated this will in any way diminish the minimum standards required for licensure, as conditional licensee applicants must still pass a knowledge exam and document proof of a qualifying score on an ASL proficiency interview. This change also aligns with the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, Inc. (RID) certification requirement (RID certification is needed for full Maine licensure as a certified interpreter or certified deaf interpreter) that candidates pursuing National Interpreter Certification or Certified Deaf Interpreter Certification (CDI) must have a minimum of a bachelor's degree in *any major* prior to taking the generalist performance exam.

The bill also extends the conditional licensure period from five to six years. This change is intended to give applicants more time to pass the RID performance examination (required for certification) and for applicants to earn a bachelor's degree, a prerequisite for performance exam eligibility.

Finally, it adds exemption language to licensure to include emergencies as determined by the director in consultation with the Commissioner such that a serious, unexpected and potentially dangerous situation requires an immediate need for interpreting services to be provided as part of an emergency response. This change in the law will allow the Department to be more flexible and responsive to meet demand for interpreting services in times of crisis.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our support for this bill and I would be happy to answer any questions now or at the work session.