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Testimony of the Office of Aging and Disability Services  
Maine Department of Health and Human Services

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services

In support of LD 2087, *An Act to Amend the Laws Governing the Licensure of American Sign Language Interpreters*

Sponsor: Representative Mathieson  
Hearing Date: January 28, 2026

Senator Bailey, Representative Mathieson, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services, my name is Betsy Hopkins, and I serve as the Director of the Office of Aging and Disability Services (OADS) within the Maine Department of Health and Human Services. I am here today to testify in support of LD 2087, *An Act to Amend the Laws Governing the Licensure of American Sign Language Interpreters*.

LD 2087 makes targeted updates to Maine's laws governing the licensure of American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters. The bill would:

1. Extend the maximum duration of a conditional interpreter license from four years to five years, with the possibility of a sixth year when the Director determines that an "extreme hardship" exists;
2. Broaden the educational pathway to licensure by allowing an associate degree or higher in any field—including, but not limited to, ASL; ASL interpreting, or Deaf studies—to meet the degree requirement; and
3. Establish an emergency provision clarifying that interpreter licensure requirements do not apply to a person providing communication assistance during an emergency response, as determined by the Director after consultation with the Commissioner of Professional and Financial Regulation.

The Department does not anticipate a fiscal impact.

The Department of Health and Human Services, through OADS, supports this Department of Professional and Financial Regulation bill. These past two years, OADS has worked closely with the Maine Division for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing & Late Deafened, the Department of Labor, the Department of Professional and Financial Regulation, the Department of Education, and other partner agencies to promote communication access for Deaf, Deaf/Blind, and Hard of Hearing individuals so they can fully participate in healthcare, education, employment, legal proceedings, and community life.

Reliable access to qualified interpreters is essential to safety, independence, and equitable access to services, particularly in rural areas where workforce shortages are most acute. The challenges addressed by LD 2087 were underscored during and after the October 2023 Lewiston shooting. Through the Transforming Interpreting Maine (TIME) project, Deaf and Hard of Hearing community members described significant gaps in communication access during emergencies, as well as longstanding shortages in the ASL interpreter workforce.

Extending the conditional licensure period provides additional time for interpreters to complete required credentials without unnecessarily leaving the workforce, while maintaining appropriate licensure oversight. Expanding the degree pathway removes an artificial barrier to entry that can limit the pipeline of qualified interpreters, particularly for Mainers whose educational backgrounds fall outside narrowly defined programs. Finally, the emergency exemption provides clarity during emergency response situations so that communication assistance can be mobilized quickly and in coordination with state leadership when time-sensitive, potentially dangerous events occur.

For these reasons, OADS urges the Committee to support LD 2087. The bill reflects community-informed recommendations, strengthens Maine's ability to respond during emergencies, and supports a more sustainable interpreter workforce while maintaining appropriate oversight.

Thank you for your time and attention. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have and to make myself available for questions at the work session.