



General Assembly

Substitute Bill No. 5241

February Session, 2024



AN ACT ESTABLISHING A BUREAU COORDINATING SERVICES FOR DEAF, HARD OF HEARING OR DEAFBLIND PERSONS.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Assembly convened:

1 Section 1. (NEW) (Effective July 1, 2024) (a) There is established a
2 Bureau of Services for Persons Who Are Deaf, Hard of Hearing or
3 Deafblind which shall be within the Department of Aging and Disability
4 Services for administrative purposes only.

5 (b) The Commissioner of Aging and Disability Services, in
6 consultation with the Advisory Board for Persons who are Deaf, Hard
7 of Hearing or Deafblind, shall, not later than October 1, 2024, appoint an
8 executive director of the bureau, which shall be an independent office
9 within the Department of Aging and Disability Services. The executive
10 director shall (1) have professional experience in serving the needs of
11 deaf, hard of hearing or deafblind persons, and (2) be (A) able to
12 communicate in American Sign Language, and (B) familiar with
13 effective interpretation methods to assist deafblind persons. The
14 commissioner shall also hire an administrative assistant for the
15 executive director.

16 (c) The executive director shall:

17 (1) Oversee Department of Aging and Disability Services' employees
18 who provide counseling, interpreting and other assistance to persons

19 who are deaf, hard of hearing and deafblind, except for federally funded
20 vocational rehabilitation employees;

21 (2) Annually update and publish on the department's Internet web
22 site a resource guide for persons who are deaf, hard of hearing or
23 deafblind;

24 (3) Maintain and publish on the department's Internet web site a list
25 provided by the Connecticut Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf of
26 registered interpreters, categorized by the setting in which such
27 interpreters are qualified to provide interpreting services;

28 (4) Assist each state agency, as defined in section 1-79 of the general
29 statutes, in appointing an employee of each such agency to serve as a
30 point of contact for concerns related to persons who are deaf, hard of
31 hearing or deafblind, pursuant to section 4 of this act, and coordinate
32 efforts to resolve such concerns with such employees serving as a point
33 of contact;

34 (5) Coordinate efforts of the department to provide information and
35 referral services to deaf, hard of hearing or deafblind persons on
36 resources available to such persons, including, but not limited to,
37 working with the Commissioner of Aging and Disability Services to
38 establish an Internet web site for departmental and bureau services for
39 such persons that is accessible to all such persons;

40 (6) Assist the commissioner in administration of the department unit
41 that registers qualified interpreters and issues identification cards to
42 state registered interpreters in accordance with section 17a-838 of the
43 general statutes;

44 (7) Coordinate responses to consumer concerns, requests for
45 assistance and referrals to resources;

46 (8) Coordinate education and training initiatives, including, but not
47 limited to, working with (A) local and state public safety and public
48 health officials and first responders on best practices for serving and

49 communicating with deaf, hard of hearing or deafblind persons, and (B)
50 sign language interpreters, oral interpreters and interpreters who are
51 trained to interpret for deafblind persons to maintain or enhance the
52 skills of such interpreters in a variety of settings;

53 (9) Collaborate with interpreting services providers and training
54 organizations to increase opportunities for mentorships, internships,
55 apprenticeships and specialized training in interpreting services for
56 deafblind persons;

57 (10) Partner with civic and community organizations serving deaf,
58 hard of hearing or deafblind persons on workshops and information
59 sessions regarding new laws, regulations or developments concerning
60 services, programs or health care needs of such persons;

61 (11) Raise public awareness of programs and services available to
62 deaf, hard of hearing or deafblind persons;

63 (12) Assist the Public Utilities Regulatory Authority in implementing
64 telecommunication relay service programs for deaf, hard of hearing or
65 deafblind persons, utilizing assistive devices for telecommunications
66 that include, but are not limited to, telecommunication relay services,
67 telephone captioning services and other captioning services;

68 (13) Work with the Governor and Connecticut television stations on
69 ways to make television broadcasts more accessible to persons who are
70 deaf, hard of hearing or deafblind; and

71 (14) In consultation with the Advisory Board for Persons who are
72 Deaf, Hard of Hearing or Deafblind, identify the needs of deaf, hard of
73 hearing or deafblind persons and address policy changes that may be
74 necessary to better serve such persons.

75 (d) Not later than July 1, 2025, and annually thereafter, the executive
76 director shall file a report, in accordance with the provisions of section
77 11-4a of the general statutes, with the joint standing committees of the
78 General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to

79 appropriations, aging, human services and public health on the
80 activities of the Bureau of Services for Deaf, Hard of Hearing or
81 Deafblind Persons in the previous calendar year. The report shall
82 include, but need not be limited to, recommendations to improve
83 services for such persons.

84 Sec. 2. Section 17a-836 of the general statutes is repealed and the
85 following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective October 1, 2024*):

86 The Advisory Board for Persons Who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing or
87 Deafblind is hereby created to advocate, strengthen and advise the
88 Governor and the General Assembly concerning state policies affecting
89 persons who are deaf, hard of hearing or deafblind and their
90 relationship to the public, industry, health care and educational
91 opportunity. The board shall:

92 (1) Monitor services for persons who are deaf, hard of hearing or
93 deafblind;

94 (2) [Periodically meet with the] Establish an annual leadership
95 roundtable meeting with the Board of Regents for Higher Education, the
96 Commissioners of Public Health, Social Services, Mental Health and
97 Addiction Services, Education, Developmental Services, [and] Children
98 and Families, Early Childhood and Economic and Community
99 Development, and the Labor Commissioner, or the commissioners' and
100 regents' designees, to discuss best practices and gaps in services for
101 persons who are deaf, hard of hearing or deafblind;

102 (3) Refer persons with complaints concerning the qualification and
103 registration of interpreters for persons who are deaf, hard of hearing or
104 deafblind to the entity designated pursuant to section 46a-10b;

105 (4) Make recommendations for (A) technical assistance and resources
106 for state agencies in order to serve persons who are deaf, hard of hearing
107 or deafblind; (B) public policy and legislative changes needed to address
108 gaps in services; and (C) the qualifications and registration of
109 interpreters pursuant to section 17a-838. The board shall submit such

110 recommendations, in accordance with section 11-4a, not later than
111 January 15, 2025, and annually thereafter, to the Governor and the joint
112 standing [committee] committees of the General Assembly having
113 cognizance of matters relating to appropriations, aging, human services
114 and public health.

115 Sec. 3. Section 17a-836a of the general statutes is repealed and the
116 following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective October 1, 2024*):

117 (a) The Advisory Board for Persons Who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing
118 or Deafblind shall consist of the following members: (1) The consultant
119 appointed by the State Board of Education in accordance with section
120 10-316a, or the consultant's designee; (2) the president of the
121 Connecticut Council of Organizations Serving the Deaf, or the
122 president's designee; (3) the president of the Connecticut Association of
123 the Deaf, or the president's designee; (4) the president of the Connecticut
124 Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, or the president's designee; (5) the
125 [Commissioner] human services advocate for the Department of Aging
126 and Disability Services; [, or the commissioner's designee;] (6) the
127 executive director of the American School for the Deaf, or the executive
128 director's designee; (7) the director of the Connecticut Chapter of We the
129 Deaf People; [and] (8) the executive director of the Bureau of Services
130 for Persons Who Are Deaf, Hard of Hearing or Deafblind, appointed
131 pursuant to section 1 of this act; (9) a representative of an organization
132 representing interpreters for persons who are deaf, hard of hearing or
133 deafblind, appointed by the executive director of the Bureau of Services
134 for Persons Who Are Deaf, Hard of Hearing or Deafblind; (10) a
135 representative of the nonprofit entity designated by the Governor
136 pursuant to section 46a-10b to serve as the Connecticut protection and
137 advocacy system for persons with disabilities, appointed by the
138 Governor; (11) a representative of an organization representing
139 Connecticut hospitals, appointed by the speaker of the House of
140 Representatives; (12) a representative of the Connecticut Tech Act
141 Project within the Department of Aging and Disability Services and
142 authorized pursuant to 29 USC 3001, as amended from time to time,

143 appointed by the Connecticut Tech Act Project Advisory Council; (13)
144 the executive director of the Office of Health Strategy, or the executive
145 director's designee; (14) the chairperson of the Public Utilities
146 Regulatory Authority, or the chairperson's designee; (15) a
147 representative of a telecommunication relay service program for deaf,
148 hard of hearing or deafblind persons, appointed by the entity contracted
149 with the state to provide telecommunication relay services; and (16)
150 eight members appointed by the Governor as follows: (A) A person who
151 is deaf; (B) a person who is hard of hearing; (C) a person who is
152 deafblind; (D) an interpreting professional who serves deaf, hard of
153 hearing or deafblind persons; (E) a healthcare professional who works
154 with persons who are deaf, hard of hearing or deafblind; (F) a parent of
155 a student in a predominantly oral education program; (G) an educator
156 who works with children who are deaf, hard of hearing or deafblind;
157 and (H) a parent of a student at the American School for the Deaf. [The
158 members of the advisory board shall elect two chairpersons of the
159 advisory board from among the members of the advisory board.] On
160 and after October 1, 2024, the chairpersons of the advisory board shall
161 be the executive director of the Bureau of Services for Persons Who Are
162 Deaf, Hard of Hearing or Deafblind and a member of the advisory board
163 elected by the members of the advisory board.

164 (b) The advisory board shall meet at least quarterly or more often at
165 the call of the chairpersons or a majority of the members. A majority of
166 members in office but not less than [nine] thirteen voting members shall
167 constitute a quorum.

168 (c) Any appointed member who fails to attend three consecutive
169 meetings or who fails to attend fifty per cent of all meetings held during
170 any calendar year shall be deemed to have resigned. Vacancies
171 occurring otherwise than by expiration of term in the membership of the
172 advisory board shall be filled by the Governor or the appointing
173 authority, as the case may be.

174 Sec. 4. (NEW) (*Effective October 1, 2024*) (a) As used in this section,
175 "state agency" has the same meaning as provided in section 1-79 of the

176 general statutes.

177 (b) Each state agency shall appoint an employee to serve as a point of
178 contact for concerns related to persons who are deaf, hard of hearing or
179 deafblind and require such employee to collaborate with the executive
180 director of the Bureau of Services for Persons Who Are Deaf, Hard of
181 Hearing or Deafblind, appointed pursuant to section 1 of this act, to
182 resolve such concerns. Each state agency shall identify the name and
183 contact information of such person in a prominent place on such
184 agency's Internet web site.

| | | |
|---|-----------------|-------------|
| This act shall take effect as follows and shall amend the following sections: | | |
| Section 1 | July 1, 2024 | New section |
| Sec. 2 | October 1, 2024 | 17a-836 |
| Sec. 3 | October 1, 2024 | 17a-836a |
| Sec. 4 | October 1, 2024 | New section |

Statement of Legislative Commissioners:

In Section 1(c)(1), "department" was changed to "Department of Aging and Disability Services" for clarity; in Section 1(c)(5), "Department of Aging and Disability Services" was changed to "department" for consistency; and in Section 1(c)(10), "regarding services" was changed to "concerning services" for clarity.

HS Joint Favorable Subst.