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Standing Committee on Education and Community Inclusion
ACT Legislative Assembly
GPO Box 1020
Canberra ACT 2601

Via email: LACommitteeECI@parliament.act.gov.au

Dear Education and Community Inclusion Committee

Submission to Inquiry into access to services and information in Auslan

The ACT Council of Social Service (ACTCOSS) is pleased to provide a submission to the Inquiry into Access to Services and Information in Auslan. Improving access to services and information in Auslan is a human rights issue, which should be addressed with urgency.

ACTCOSS endorses the submissions made by Advocacy for Inclusion (AFI) and other disability and carer advocacy organisations. To learn more about how to support access to Auslan, please contact Advocacy for Inclusion.

According to the 2021 Census, 244 people in the ACT use Auslan as a first language.¹ This amounts to 0.05% of the Canberra population and is in line with other jurisdictions and the national average of 0.06% (or 16,242 people).² We do not have data about how many other people in the ACT are Deaf, hard of hearing or experiencing hearing loss, but we do know that not everyone has access to adequate and appropriate education and information about Auslan.

Barriers to widespread use of Auslan means that people who use it as a primary language struggle to achieve self-determination or a sense of control over their lives.

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, [Cultural Diversity: Census 2021](#), Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2022, accessed 11 July 2022.

² Australian Bureau of Statistics, [Cultural Diversity: Census 2021](#), Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2022, accessed 11 July 2022.

This can cause serious problems for healthcare, employment, housing and education.

We need strengthening policy and legislation to increase provision of services and information in Auslan. However, ACTCOSS is concerned that workforce issues would make this difficult.

Deaf Connect's submission to the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability notes a significant national Auslan interpreter workforce shortage.

For entry level accreditation as a Paraprofessional Auslan Interpreter, the minimum length of study is approximately three years, but can take longer if there are not an adequate amount of courses on offer. For full Professional Auslan Interpreter level accreditation, a further four to six years of study is required. Nine years of specialised study is often required before someone can act as an Auslan Interpreter in complex areas such as health or legal services.

According to Deaf Connect, the interpreter workforce has a high rate of turnover and attrition. Jobs are usually casualised, offer little financial security and often require unpaid preparation time for complicated assignments. The national Australian Sign Language Interpreters Association recommends no more than five hours a day in a five-day working week, which means that workers are unable to work full-time, despite a substantive investment in education.

Broader issues that exist in the community sector and for frontline service providers also exist for Auslan Interpreters. These include inadequate funding, burnout, job insecurity and a lack of cultural safety to support diversity in the workforce.

In order to address workforce shortages, we need significant investment in education, training and workforce support. Interpreting should be recognised as a priority workforce area and courses need to be free or heavily subsidised. Training organisations must be supported to attract students and grow the workforce, but also to develop accessible pathways to interpreting careers for Deaf people.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Campbell." The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dr Emma Campbell
Chief Executive Officer

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