Written Evidence to the Scottish Parliament’s Education and Culture Committee on the British Sign Language (Scotland) Bill

1. Children’s Hearings Scotland (CHS) is a Non-Departmental Public Body established under the Children’s Hearings (Scotland) Act 2011, which entered into force on 24 June 2013. CHS assists the National Convener with the delivery of his functions in relation to the recruitment, selection, appointment and re-appointment, training, retention and support of volunteer panel members within the Children’s Hearings System. Further information about CHS and the National Convener can be found on our website www.chscotland.gov.uk.

2. As one of the proposed ‘listed authorities’ within the British Sign Language (Scotland) Bill we are grateful to the Education and Culture Committee for the opportunity to comment on the general principles behind the Bill.

3. We support the policy intention behind the Bill to promote the use of British Sign Language (BSL) and welcome the focus that the Bill brings to BSL service provision by public bodies. However, we are unsure whether the Bill, as drafted, will add to the legislation which already exists in this area and whether it will lead to real practical improvements in BSL provision either for children and adults attending children’s hearings or the wider public accessing information about the children’s hearings system.

4. Within the children’s hearings system existing legislation requires the Scottish Children’s Reporter Administration (SCRA) to make arrangements for an interpreter for a child or relevant person to secure their participation in a children’s hearing (Rule 61(1)f) of the Children’s Hearings (Scotland) Act 2011 (Rules of Procedure in Children’s Hearings) Rules 2013). We understand that SCRA interpret this provision as including BSL interpretation and that this request can be made without the need to declare a disability.

5. As an organisation we are committed to making the information we provide about the children’s hearings system and our work within it as accessible as possible. We are concerned that the unintended impact of the Bill will be to direct our resources towards the administration of a BSL plan rather than to the accessibility of our communications. As one of the smallest public bodies, with 17 FTE staff, the allocation of resources is a key consideration for us. Our preferred approach is to work in partnership with other public bodies and partner organisations with expertise in this area to ensure our communications are as accessible as possible to all.

Children’s Hearings Scotland
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