We write to you in support of the current member’s proposal for a BSL Bill in Scotland. Since the Scottish Parliament recognised BSL as a language in March 2011, there has been little change within public sector provision to ensure Deaf BSL users have equal access to services.

We have been working with the Deaf community in Lanarkshire since 2011, so we are familiar with the service levels that the Deaf community are experiencing. The Deaf community do not get the access that they are entitled to, in law, because of the lack of awareness of their needs. We have experience of this lack of awareness in Lanarkshire, however we are hear from others working with the Deaf community across the country, and the story is the same in many other areas.

In Lanarkshire there is virtually no access to Social Service provision for Deaf people, there are no dedicated Social Work Services provided by experienced staff knowledgeable within Sign Language and Its culture. The only service provision in Lanarkshire is provided by Deaf Services Lanarkshire which is Whole staffed by unpaid volunteers.

Outside of Glasgow, Lanarkshire is one of the biggest regions and yet the provision to the Deaf Community is Dismal. Our Deaf Community cannot access General Health Information and therefore will make little change in their day to day life to ensure better Health. Unless you live in Glasgow you get nothing.

There is no access to voluntary services such as CAB: Victim Support: Money Advice Services and other community organisations.

This is because there is no funding provided to the voluntary organisations to pay for Sign Language Interpreters. There is the same lack of awareness of the needs of the Deaf community in many of these organisations as there is in the statutory bodies which have a duty of care for the whole population. Most Voluntary & Local Authorities assume the Interpreting provision is free or it is the responsibility of the Deaf person to attend with a family member or friend (This is totally unfair as it denies the Deaf person equal access to services and strips them of their independence).

There is approximately 1 Interpreter to every 100 Deaf people in Scotland, when comparing the figures with Finland, a country of similar population in Europe, it is shameful, as Finland have 1 Interpreter for every 6 Deaf people. Finland coincidently has the same population of Deaf people as we have within Scotland.
More emphasis needs to be placed on providing training courses to Interpreter level and investing in Tutors of Sign Language.

F.E Colleges who currently provide Sign Language Courses should be support and advised when employing Tutors of BSL, as quite often especially within our local area, the Tutor has the most basic qualification and knows nothing about the Deaf Community.

SQA should be adequately resourced to allow more quality control visits to their centres, to ensure that the centres are up to date with their provision of courses and staff are qualified to an appropriate level for the courses they are presenting.

We currently provide Sign Language Courses from Introduction up to trainee Interpreter equivalent. However one of our major stumbling blocks is the cost of the higher level (PDA) course as students cannot receive grant subsidy. The need to recruit new Interpreters is crucial as many of the current Interpreters are now reaching an age where they are considering retirement.

These interpreters must be replaced and numbers increased.

A hearing Child of Deaf Parents carries a heavy burden from a very young age (This is not the fault of the Deaf parents but the fault of society at large), The child becomes a carer due to the lack of awareness by public service providers.

We are now in 2015 and still the Hearing Child, (In some cases 5 years old) is asked to Interpreter for the Social Worker/ Health Visitor/Police/Hospitals/Doctors etc. This is unacceptable. Ignorance is no excuse in 2015; public services providers have a duty of care to the Deaf Community which it would appear they are sadly failing.

Therefore it is crucial to the Deaf Community and their families that this bill be passed to ensure a better quality of life by ensuring all public service providers address their duty of care when planning future services.

One final comment:
Many of our volunteers are Children of Deaf Adults who have first-hand experience of the inequities which still blight the lives of the Deaf community, and they are saddened by the lack of progress over the last 50 years.