

Personal Story:

Work

I want to talk about how the BSL (Scotland) Bill is relevant to my work. I use a BSL interpreter every day at work. People's attitudes towards me are different now that I have an interpreter, compared to before when I didn't. However, hearing people often stay away from me when the interpreter is not around and only want to engage with the interpreter. I understand that, like me, they rely on the interpreter being there for communication, but their reluctance to engage with me directly means that I can be isolated from my colleagues. I realised I can help by encouraging colleagues to pick up some BSL and by trying to make them more comfortable around me, but we need more. If the BSL Bill passes, we can do more to promote BSL is a real language like other spoken languages, after all it is, and this hopefully will make people as comfortable as they would be attempting to communicate with someone where language barriers exist. At the moment people see the interpreter like my mother or as a care worker, which is not helpful, but my interpreter is simply a language worker. People need to see the language issue, not the interpreter. The BSL (Scotland) Bill will help people understand that sign language is my first language – it will raise awareness of the language and help improve relationships with my colleagues at work.

Medical

I've been a member of BUPA for years, and am currently a policy holder of Aviva health insurance. My experience with both companies has been the negative. Their attitudes and awareness of Deaf peoples' needs is absent, and when I need to ask for interpreter support to process claims or get treatment I am refused. On one occasion I was forced to use a specialist doctor, despite there being another doctor who was better suited to me because he could sign. This has been very frustrating for me, especially given that I pay fees just like other hearing customers. Not being permitted to choose a medical professional who meets my needs, apparently because they are not contracted to BUPA/Aviva, is not a good enough reason. They have refused to pay for an interpreter, and have

forced me to use their contracted provider, ignoring their own commitment to customer care and existing legislation in the form of the Equalities Act. The BSL (Scotland) Bill will, I hope, help raise awareness that BSL is a bona fide community language and that companies must provide services to Deaf people fairly and appropriately. The work being done on the BSL (Scotland) Bill, and I hope the enactment of a new BSL Act, will create the right conditions to raise awareness of these issues and resolve them for Deaf customers going forward.

Thank you for attending to this matter.

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