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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2026

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A N A C T

RELATING TO HEALTH AND SAFETY -- LICENSING OF HEALTHCARE FACILITIES

Introduced By: Representatives Handy, Cruz, and McGaw

Date Introduced: February 27, 2026

Referred To: House Health & Human Services

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Chapter 23-17 of the General Laws entitled "Licensing of Healthcare
2 Facilities" is hereby amended by adding thereto the following section:

3 **23-17-54.1. Protection of American sign language interpreter services.**

4 (a) No reduction without approval. No hospital, freestanding emergency-care facility, state
5 agency, or other entity providing public services shall reduce the number, availability, or hours of
6 American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter services required under state or federal law, including
7 §§ 23-17-54 and 8-5-8, without the prior written approval of the Rhode Island commission on the
8 deaf and hard of hearing (RICDHH).

9 (b) Commission review. The RICDHH shall review any proposed reduction to ensure that
10 the reduction will not impair meaningful communication access for individuals who are deaf, hard
11 of hearing, or deaf-blind.

12 (c) Approval criteria. In granting approval, the RICDHH shall consider:

13 (1) Current and projected need for ASL interpreter services in the affected setting;

14 (2) The availability of qualified interpreters;

15 (3) Any proposed alternative communication methods; and

16 (4) Compliance with federal and state accessibility laws.

17 (d) Enforcement. Any reduction of ASL interpreter services without RICDHH approval
18 shall constitute a violation of licensure, certification, or program compliance requirements, as
19 applicable, and may result in administrative penalties, including fines, suspension, or revocation of

1 [licensure or program authorization.](#)

2 SECTION 2. This act shall take effect upon passage.

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EXPLANATION
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
OF
A N A C T
RELATING TO HEALTH AND SAFETY -- LICENSING OF HEALTHCARE FACILITIES

1 This act would require approval by the Rhode Island commission on the deaf and hard of
2 hearing before any reduction in American Sign Language interpreter services in hospitals and other
3 public service facilities.

4 This act would take effect upon passage.

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