

Senate Business, Labor, & Technology

03/27/2025 Upon Adjournment

HB25-1154 Communication Serv People with Disabilities Enter

Typed Text of Testimony Submitted

Name, Position, Representing	Typed Text of Testimony
Shannon Callahan For themselves	<p>March 26, 2025 Reference to HB25-1154</p> <p>Chairperson and Senators of the Committee,</p> <p>My name is Shannon Callahan, and I am here today to express my strong support for HB25-1154. As a deaf taxpayer and an active member of Colorado’s Deaf/Deaf ASL(American Sign Language) Users community, I have seen firsthand the challenges we face in ensuring accessible and effective communication services. Moving these services into a Type 1 (Enterprise) status is a critical step toward addressing those challenges and improving the system that serves us.</p> <p>Transitioning to an enterprise model will allow for a more targeted expansion of support where it is needed most. Under the current structure, key decisions are often made by departments with little understanding of the lived experiences of the Deaf and Deaf ASL Users communities. This has led to gaps in accessibility, misallocation of resources, and policies that do not fully reflect our needs. For the last few years, this entity has been plagued with a constant lack of maintained finances. By shifting to an Enterprise entity, decision-making authority will be more independent, ensuring that those overseeing these services have the expertise and lived experience necessary to make informed choices. At the same time, having the financials in a solid position to support those necessary services.</p> <p>Furthermore, this move opens the door for greater representation of the Deaf, Deaf ASL Users, and DeafDisabled communities in advisory committees and the decision-making process. It is crucial to include diverse voices to shape policies that accurately reflect the full spectrum of communication access needs in Colorado. Having direct input will be transformative, fostering a system that is more responsive and adaptable to real-world challenges.</p>

As part of this transition, the roles of the seven board members must be clearly defined, and the board should be expanded to include at least two additional community representatives: one Deaf individual who uses American Sign Language and one Deaf individual who uses technology-assisted devices or speech-based communication. This oversight is not just symbolic. It is an essential safeguard to ensure that decisions are informed by the lived experiences of the communities these services aim to support. With nine total members, including these dedicated Deaf/Deaf ASL User representatives, the entity and board will be better positioned to address complex accessibility issues and deliver solutions that meet the real needs of Colorado’s diverse population.

Additionally, we must carefully consider the finer details regarding the board of directors’ roles and their relationship with the Deaf community, particularly Deaf ASL Users. Given the current political climate and the actions of the current administration, we have seen how loopholes can be exploited to push agendas that bypass both the law and the fundamental purpose of an organization. This underscores the urgent need for safeguards within this structure to prevent such misuse and ensure that the enterprise remains accountable to the communities it serves.

This legislation represents more than just a structural change. It is a necessary paradigm shift in how we approach accessibility and equity. It is an opportunity to build a more structural and effective framework that truly serves the communities it was designed for. I urge you to support HB25-1154 and take this vital step toward ensuring communication access for all Deaf Coloradans. Nothing about us without us.

From the taxpayer within Senate District 32 / House District 9.

Thank you,

Chairperson and Senators of the Committee,

My name is Shannon Callahan, and I am here today to express my strong support for HB25-1154. As a deaf taxpayer and an active member of Colorado's Deaf/Deaf ASL(American Sign Language) Users community, I have seen firsthand the challenges we face in ensuring accessible and effective communication services. Moving these services into a Type 1 (Enterprise) status is a critical step toward addressing those challenges and improving the system that serves us. Transitioning to an enterprise model will allow for a more targeted expansion of support where it is needed most. Under the current structure, key decisions are often made by departments with little understanding of the lived experiences of the Deaf and Deaf ASL Users communities. This has led to gaps in accessibility, misallocation of resources, and policies that do not fully reflect our needs. For the last few years, this entity has been plagued with a constant lack of maintained finances. By shifting to an Enterprise entity, decision-making authority will be more independent, ensuring that those overseeing these services have the expertise and lived experience necessary to make informed choices. At the same time, having the financials in a solid position to support those necessary services.

Furthermore, this move opens the door for greater representation of the Deaf, Deaf ASL Users, and DeafDisabled communities in advisory committees and the decision-making process. It is crucial to include diverse voices to shape policies that accurately reflect the full spectrum of communication access needs in Colorado. Having direct input will be transformative, fostering a system that is more responsive and adaptable to real-world challenges.

As part of this transition, the roles of the seven board members must be clearly defined, and the board should be expanded to include at least two additional community representatives: one Deaf individual who uses American Sign Language and one Deaf individual who uses technology-assisted devices or speech-based communication. This oversight is not just symbolic. It is an essential safeguard to ensure that decisions are informed by the lived experiences of the communities these services aim to support. With nine total members, including these dedicated Deaf/Deaf ASL User representatives, the entity and board will be better positioned to address complex accessibility issues and deliver solutions that meet the real needs of Colorado's diverse population.

Additionally, we must carefully consider the finer details regarding the board of directors' roles and their relationship with the Deaf community, particularly Deaf ASL Users. Given the current political climate and the actions of the current administration, we have seen how loopholes can be exploited to push agendas that bypass both the law and the fundamental purpose of an organization. This underscores the urgent need for safeguards within this structure to prevent such misuse and ensure that the enterprise remains accountable to the communities it serves.

This legislation represents more than just a structural change. It is a necessary paradigm shift in how we approach accessibility and equity. It is an opportunity to build a more structural and effective framework that truly serves the communities it was designed for. I urge you to support HB25-1154 and take this vital step toward ensuring communication access for all Deaf Coloradans. Nothing about us without us.

From the taxpayer within Senate District 32 / House District 9.

Thank you,

Chairperson and Senators of the Committee,

My name is Shannon Callahan, and I am here today to express my strong support for HB25-1154. As a deaf taxpayer and an active member of Colorado's Deaf/Deaf ASL(American Sign Language) Users community, I have seen firsthand the challenges we face in ensuring accessible and effective communication services. Moving these services into a Type 1 (Enterprise) status is a critical step toward addressing those challenges and improving the system that serves us. Transitioning to an enterprise model will allow for a more targeted expansion of support where it is needed most. Under the current structure, key decisions are often made by departments with little understanding of the lived experiences of the Deaf and Deaf ASL Users communities. This has led to gaps in accessibility, misallocation of resources, and policies that do not fully reflect our needs. For the last few years, this entity has been plagued with a constant lack of maintained finances. By shifting to an Enterprise entity, decision-making authority will be more independent, ensuring that those overseeing these services have the expertise and lived experience necessary to make informed choices. At the same time, having the financials in a solid position to support those necessary services.

Furthermore, this move opens the door for greater representation of the Deaf, Deaf ASL Users, and DeafDisabled communities in advisory committees and the decision-making process. It is crucial to include diverse voices to shape policies that accurately reflect the full spectrum of communication access needs in Colorado. Having direct input will be transformative, fostering a system that is more responsive and adaptable to real-world challenges.

As part of this transition, the roles of the seven board members must be clearly defined, and the board should be expanded to include at least two additional community representatives: one Deaf individual who uses American Sign Language and one Deaf individual who uses technology-assisted devices or speech-based communication. This oversight is not just symbolic. It is an essential safeguard to ensure that decisions are informed by the lived experiences of the communities these services aim to support. With nine total members, including these dedicated Deaf/Deaf ASL User representatives, the entity and board will be better positioned to address complex accessibility issues and deliver solutions that meet the real needs of Colorado's diverse population.

Additionally, we must carefully consider the finer details regarding the board of directors' roles and their relationship with the Deaf community, particularly Deaf ASL Users. Given the current political climate and the actions of the current administration, we have seen how loopholes can be exploited to push agendas that bypass both the law and the fundamental purpose of an organization. This underscores the urgent need for safeguards within this structure to prevent such misuse and ensure that the enterprise remains accountable to the communities it serves.

This legislation represents more than just a structural change. It is a necessary paradigm shift in how we approach accessibility and equity. It is an opportunity to build a more structural and effective framework that truly serves the communities it was designed for. I urge you to support HB25-1154 and take this vital step toward ensuring communication access for all Deaf Coloradans. Nothing about us without us.

From the taxpayer within Senate District 32 / House District 9.

Thank you,

Testimony to the Business, Labor, & Technology Committee Regarding HB25-1154

Submitted by Jennifer Pfau, Non-Legal Advocate & Board Member, Colorado Association of the Deaf

Hello,, Committee Members. My name is Jennifer Pfau. I am a non-legal advocate and serve on the board of the Colorado Association of the Deaf, an affiliate of the National Association of the Deaf. Our organization is dedicated to protecting the rights and advancing the needs of Deaf Coloradans who use American Sign Language (ASL).

With over 25 years of experience in the nonprofit and telecommunications sectors, I have focused my career on advancing accessibility and equitable representation. As a former District Sales Manager for Sorenson Communications, I led teams serving Deaf-ASL communities across five states. I also co-founded Colorado's first Deaf-run nonprofit supporting Deaf survivors of domestic and sexual violence.

I first learned about HB25-1154 in February through a Facebook post announcing the bill's second reading. I reached out for more information but received no further updates. It was disappointing to discover that the bill had passed its third reading on March 11 without notice or an opportunity for input from the Deaf-ASL community.

This experience highlights a recurring challenge: the lack of timely, direct communication regarding legislative initiatives that impact our community. While I recognize and appreciate the work of cross-disability organizations, they do not always reflect the specific lived experiences of Deaf-ASL users. I respectfully encourage future legislative efforts to include proactive engagement with Deaf-ASL constituents.

Modern communication technologies are vital to equitable access. **Direct Video Calling**, endorsed by the Federal Communications Commission, allows Deaf-ASL users to communicate in their native language without the need for interpretation. While **Video Remote Interpreting (VRI)** has not been federally endorsed, it is increasingly adopted by service providers in other states and has proven to be a valuable tool for improving communication access. It is important for Colorado to stay aligned with such advancements to serve its residents effectively.

While the bill does not specifically define the roles of the board, and with Mr. Shannon Callahan's recent recommendation to clarify the board's function through an amendment, the Colorado Association of the Deaf (CAD) supports this recommendation. We believe it is essential to clearly establish the responsibilities of the Governor-appointed board members and ensure they have a meaningful role in decision-making—not limited to an advisory capacity, but with active influence in policy development and implementation.

Although the bill has progressed, I respectfully urge the committee to consider the following:

1. **Clarify the board's role** in the bill language to ensure decision-making authority, not solely advisory input.
2. **Ensure inclusive appointments** by including at least two individuals who use communication access services—specifically, one representing Deaf-ASL users and another representing individuals who are speech-impaired or Hard of Hearing.

These additions would help fulfill the intent of HB25-1154 by ensuring that diverse communication needs are meaningfully represented at the decision-making level.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration. I support HB25-1154 and strongly recommend that inclusive representation and clearly defined board roles be incorporated to promote equity, transparency, and trust in the process.