



December 24, 2013

Frank Stilwagner
Executive Director
Seattle Men's Chorus
Flying House Productions
319 12th Avenue
Seattle, WA 98122-5504

Dear Mr. Stilwagner:

The National Association of the Deaf (NAD) and its state affiliate, the Washington State Association of the Deaf (WSAD), along with our counterparts in the interpreting profession, the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) and Washington State Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (WSRID), urge the Seattle Men's Chorus to uphold its mission to "entertain, enlighten, unify and heal your audience and members" by accepting and valuing its deaf and hard of hearing citizens.

It has come to our attention that the deaf and hard of hearing community in Washington State have expressed concern with the Seattle Men's Chorus decision on how the organization attempts to provide access to deaf and hard of hearing people. We have learned that numerous representatives from the interpreting and deaf and hard of hearing communities have shared their dissatisfaction and discontent with the Seattle Men's Chorus' choice to use Kevin Gallagher as a "signer" for its performances. While the NAD, WSAD, RID and WSRID applaud your effort to provide an interpreter for deaf and hard of hearing patrons, we ask that you only use qualified, professional and certified American Sign Language interpreters in all your performances from this point forward.

Founded in 1880, the NAD is the oldest civil rights organization in the United States, and is dedicated to preserving, protecting, and promoting the civil, human, and linguistic rights of all deaf and hard of hearing individuals in this country. Since 1909, WSAD has served the deaf and hard of hearing citizens in the State of Washington as a statewide political advocacy organization. RID is a national membership organization of professional sign language interpreters, and since 1964 has been advocating for excellence in the delivery of interpretation and transliteration services between people who use sign language and people who use spoken language. WSRID has, since 1968, initiated, sponsored, promoted and executed policies and activities that will further the profession of interpretation of American Sign Language and the transliteration of English.

All four organizations collectively represent the national and Washington state deaf and hard of hearing community and the professional sign language interpreters who work to facilitate effective communications for everyone. Together, we send this message to you and the Seattle Men's Chorus to explain what it means to provide effective communication through a qualified, professional and certified American Sign Language interpreter in all performances.

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In your December 15, 2013 interview with Seattle's News Talk on KIRO Radio 97.3 FM, you said that you "understand that ASL is a language," and that you "do know that Kevin is not interpreting, you know, word for word ASL, there is always, you know, an artistic element to it." Moreover, you added that you have "talked with Kevin about it. He's completely open and willing to work with ASL coaches to help provide the need that these people are asking for."

Professional interpreting is not something that someone performs at a whim, but can only be performed by highly skilled professionals who have undergone years of training with full fluency in both English and American Sign Language. You have conceded that Mr. Gallagher requires ASL coach. While an ASL coach can successfully support an interpreter's work, in this case, it would still not provide the communication access that Deaf people need. The best way to ensure that an interpreter meets the minimum standards for interpreters is to require certification. The NAD and RID provide a joint national certification that has minimum educational requirements and a rigorous test to determine whether an individual meets the minimum standards for interpreting.

Interpreting for a unique performing arts setting like the Seattle Men's Chorus requires knowledge and skills that go beyond the minimum skills. Based on a great deal of feedback from the community, even with Kevin Gallagher's willingness to work with ASL coaches, his services do not equate qualified interpreting. By not providing a qualified, professional, and certified ASL interpreter, your organization is at risk of not providing effective communication as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act, 42 U.S.C. §§ 12101 et seq.; the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 29 U.S.C. § 701 et seq.; and the Washington State Law Against Discrimination, R.C.W. 49.60.

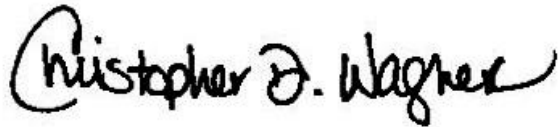
In addition to legal mandates that bar the Seattle Men's Chorus from continuing to provide inadequate signing (and not interpreting), your association should follow its own vision statement, which is "to accept and value its gay and lesbian citizens." Your mission is to "entertain, enlighten, unify and heal our audience and members, using the power of words and music to recognize the value of gay and straight people and their relationships." How can you accept and value gay and lesbian citizens who are deaf and hard of hearing that communicate through ASL if you refuse to recognize that they are unable to be entertained, enlightened, unified or healed through a qualified, professional, and certified interpreter?

The NAD, WSAD, RID, and WSRID all appreciate that you and the Seattle Men's Chorus are trying to provide effective communication access to the deaf and hard of hearing community. We simply ask that you use a qualified, professional and certified ASL interpreter instead of a well-meaning person who knows sign language. We look forward to resolving this matter with you, and hope to avoid any further unnecessary negative publicity, especially after what happened with the recent "fake interpreter" at the Mandela ceremony in South Africa.

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Should you have any questions or wish to discuss this matter, please contact the NAD or the RID through their respective executive directors: Howard A. Rosenblum at howard.rosenblum@nad.org or Shane Feldman at sfeldman@rid.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Christopher D. Wagner". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'C'.

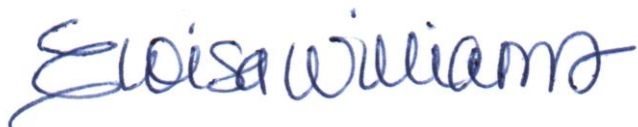
Christopher Wagner
President, NAD

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Yes Serious". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'Y'.

Yes Serious
President, WSAD

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dawn Witcher". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'D'.

Dawn Witcher
President, RID

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Eloisa Williams". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'E'.

Eloisa Williams
President, WSRID