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To: Professor Carol Neidle
Boston University
From: Heidi Reed, Commissioner, MCDHH

The request for recognition of American Sign Language (ASL) for foreign language study and academic credit within the College of Arts & Sciences (CAS) at Boston University is being followed with interest in the larger community. As a result, the linguistic and cultural significance of ASL is appropriately in the spotlight. There is also a service provider perspective. Because academic credit creates incentive for study of specific languages, CAS graduates, as well as the people they will provide services to and work with in the future, will benefit from the inclusion of ASL among those recognized languages.

ASL and other language skills have a role to play in the workplace. Employers are welcoming training that increases appreciation of workplace diversity as an asset; including language diversity. This past year, in response to requests, MCDHH delivered communication access related training to more than 11,000 businesses and service providing agencies whose employees lack the linguistic and cultural awareness necessary for doing business with co-workers or clients who use ASL.

Within the medical field, there are specific situations where ASL skills are a requirement as well as an asset. More than 135 hospitals and medical facilities obtain professional ASL interpreter services because they are legally mandated to meet the needs of patients, families, and employees who use American Sign Language. Aside from following the law by obtaining interpreters, the medical profession stands to benefit from having practical knowledge of ASL. Medical personnel are typically without the most rudimentary knowledge of ASL, and as a result, are at a distinct disadvantage in handling basic interpersonal communication with an ASL using patient when the interpreter is out of the room.

The College of Arts & Sciences should consider the evolving workplace and the benefits of including ASL as one of the foreign languages that reflect investment in diversity as well as interpersonal skills, and are well worthy of academic credit.