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July 8, 2007

Mr. Jim Buckheit, Executive Director
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
State Board of Education
333 Market Street
Harrisburg, PA 17126-0333

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INDEPENDENT REGULATORY
REVIEW COMMISSION

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PA. STATE BOARD
OF EDUCATION

Dear Mr. Buckheit,

I am writing in response to the information I have received concerning the proposed regulations for paraprofessionals.

My current job is working with the visually impaired students, which also includes preparing Brailled work sheets, class material and tests for the students. I have been certified through the Hadley School for the Blind in Braille II, and also received certificates in other courses offered by the Hadley school relating to Orientation and Mobility, adjusting to blindness, blindness and self-esteem, adapting the home and personal items so a person with a visual impairment can live as independently as possible etc. I am also certified in CPR and 1st aid.

I receive a minimum of 10 hours of training from the school district every year and I also take several other courses and attend seminars given by the IU or sponsored by the Luzerne County Children & Youth since I am a foster parent.

I have completed and submitted a portfolio with over 100 points for which I received a certificate of completion with High Honors and I work closely with all the teaching staff in my school. If there are any questions that I may have, there is a teacher there for immediate support. I can also rely on the staff at the Hadley School for any questions that I may have regarding Braille or concerns with a child's adjustment with his/her visual impairment.

I feel that I have done all that is possible at this time to meet the qualifications for my current role. That is not to say that I will not attend any further classes, seminars etc. as they are offered.

Honestly I can not see how a state test could measure my qualifications for the job I am in currently, since I am the only paraprofessional in my district with any Braille knowledge or a

background of courses pertaining to the blind or visually impaired student. When I need to take sick days, rarely is a substitute ever sent in for me. If one is, they can not truly do my job, because it is specialized. Should this position dissolve, I would trust that experience, workshops, seminars, classes and various certificates would deem me qualified to work within the district.

I think that knowledge is one thing, but on the job experience and applying that experience & knowledge in any given situation gives a more true evaluation of one's ability. I believe that the only people in a position to accurately testify to a paraprofessional's ability, & qualifications, is his/her superiors through observation.

Having 6 children of my own, it would be difficult and also a financial burden for me to pursue a 2 year degree. Currently here is a shortage of Paraprofessionals in a number of districts and we work for poverty level wages. (my salary is approx. \$12,000 a year). I think wages have to increase substantially especially if these requirements are passed. I also believe that the shortage would only be exacerbated if the proposed requirements are imposed.

In my current position, if my qualifications would not meet with the states "rigorous" standards, I would seriously have to consider employment as a Braille transcriptionist or in some other capacity.

Sincerely,

Gloria Eichhorst

Gloria Eichhorst

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