

**Sign Language Interpreting Service (SLIS)**  
**Pre-budget Submission to**  
**Joint Committee on Social Protection, Community and Rural Development**  
**to enhance equality and inclusion of Irelands Deaf community**

The Houses of the Oireachtas acknowledge that Irelands Deaf community endure “extreme marginalisation”<sup>1</sup>. This remains the case despite advances in legislation (Irish Sign Language - ISL Act 2017) and national policy (*National Disability Inclusion Strategy (NDIS) 2017-2022*).

Sign Language Interpreting Service (SLIS) is supported and funded by the Citizens Information Board (CIB) to provide a range of services to reduce barriers Deaf people face every day. SLIS provide a range of services to support access and referrals to Irish Sign Language interpreters, including funerals, emergencies, GP access and support services, as well as IRIS - the national remote interpreting service. Indicator 1.4b NDIS 2017 - 2022 was based on these core SLIS services. A voucher scheme is operating successfully since October 2023, with an annual budget allocated by the Minister for Social Protection, as per section 9 of the ISL Act.

However, the implementation of the ISL Act 2017 remains “*well below the expectations of the legislation*”<sup>2</sup>, while policy gains have stalled in recent years. The deaf led SLIS board, and its Stakeholder Group, identify below key steps to achieve progress. Some suggested initiatives require budget resources, others simply require leadership (cost free).

- **Change the model of service provision to Deaf communities from a welfare basis to an equality model**, following DPO recommendations and the evidence base, including recommendation ten of the *Periodic Critical Review of CIB* (DSP, May 22)<sup>3</sup>.
  - This involves budget re-organisation, but not additional exchequer expenditure.
  
- **Provide for well-resourced, equality based and Deaf led services;**
  - including core SLIS interpreting services (referral services and Irish Remote Interpreting Service (IRIS) development and technology e.g. an IRIS App).

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<sup>1</sup> The Houses of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Justice and Equality ‘*Report on the Formal Recognition of Irish Sign Language*’, Government Publications: October 2016.

<sup>2</sup> National Disability Authority, 2021, ‘*Report on the Operation of the Irish Sign Language Act 2017*’, NDA.

<sup>3</sup> A Periodic Critical Review (PCR) of CIB (May 2022) by the Department of Social Protection ([www.gov.ie/en/organisation/department-of-social-protection](http://www.gov.ie/en/organisation/department-of-social-protection))

- Allow expenditure from the budget for promotion and evaluation of the nascent Voucher Scheme to guide its operation, and enhance clear ISL communications of this vital scheme provided for in the ISL Act. (No additional exchequer expenditure.)

➤ **Progress a plan to increase the supply and quality of ISL Interpreters**

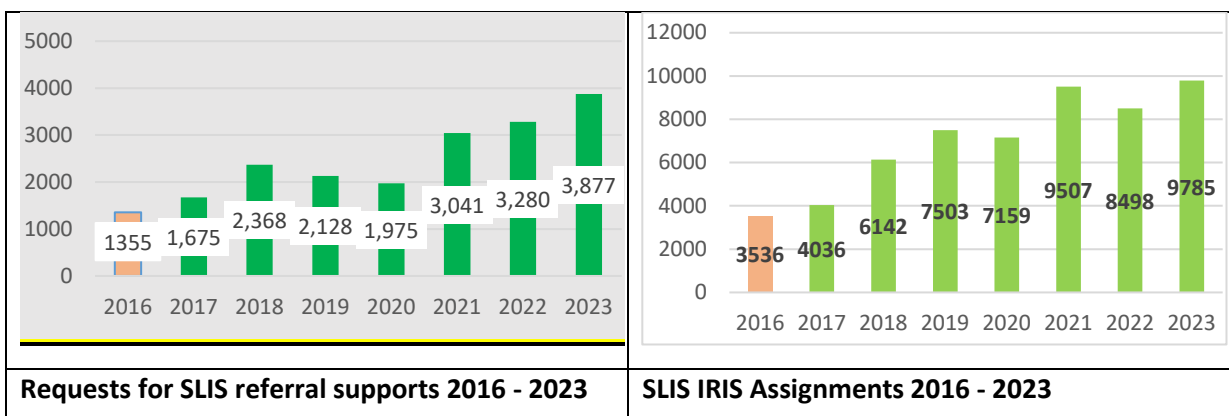
- Expand throughput on the Trinity College B.A. Degree for interpreters.
- Resource a post-graduate course, already on TCD books, to ensure supply of interpreters and advanced competencies, e.g. in medical and legal interpreting.
- Resource an annual calendar of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) to support quality interpreting for Irelands Deaf community and service providers. (None of above may be funded by DSP or CRA, but by other departments.)

**Background**

Achievements by SLIS under the NDIS 2017-2022 are identified in the first report to the *United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2021)*<sup>4</sup>, and the *Evaluation of SLIS National Disability Inclusion Strategy (NDIS) actions*<sup>5</sup>. These services helped bridge the “*extreme marginalization*” and “*systematic exclusion*”<sup>6</sup> of Ireland’s Deaf community.

**SLIS succeeded in Expanding Effective Services**

Services expanded significantly under the NDIS 2017-2022, in some cases with decreasing capacity. Resourcing is required to build on these achievements in a new National Disability Strategy, from 2024.



<sup>4</sup> <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/75e45-irelands-first-report-to-the-united-nations-committee-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities/>.

<sup>5</sup> [https://slis.ie/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/summary-SLIS\\_NDIS\\_Actions\\_final\\_evaluation\\_report-V2.pdf](https://slis.ie/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/summary-SLIS_NDIS_Actions_final_evaluation_report-V2.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> As identified in The Houses of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Justice and Equality Report on the Formal Recognition of Irish Sign Language, Government Publications: October 2016.

**SLIS advanced in Quality Development Initiatives including:**

- SLIS developed a quality assurance and registration scheme for sign language interpreters as per the ISL Act. The register, published by SLIS on 20/12/2020, is operated by an independent company, RISLI, funded and supported by CIB, incorporated in 2022.
- Supported quality interpreting through annual CPD programmes in 2021 and 2022, and Increased numbers of Deaf interpreters and number of remote interpreters in IRIS.
- Piloted an IRIS app and Voucher scheme. The Voucher scheme is now mainstreamed.

**SLIS Budget proposal 2025 includes business cases to CIB and ask the DSP to prioritise**

- **Full time Finance Officer (€27,125)** – currently Half time – to ensure probity / compliance.
- **Voucher scheme 2025 budget request €426,575** (includes promotion expenses).
- **Development of a dedicated remote interpreting IRIS APP (€88,000).**
- **IRIS Connect (€59,943)** – a weekly service for most marginalised Deaf people and groups.
- **Research and Development Officer (€52,464)** – to support quality services.

Non-funded initiatives required include

- consultation with DPO and Deaf community to transition Deaf services to an equality basis,
- clarifying responsibilities and budgets with appropriate bodies, and
- allowing more flexible contracting for SLIS IRIS interpreters.

**For further information or queries please contact:**

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