SENATE HEALTH, HUMAN SERVICES AND SENIOR CITIZENS COMMITTEE

STATEMENT TO

SENATE, No. 2441

with committee amendments

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: DECEMBER 7, 2020

The Senate Health, Human Services and Senior Citizens Committee reports favorably and with committee amendments Senate Bill No. 2441.

This bill amends section 1 of P.L.1995, c.168 (C.34:1-69.1a) to expand the membership of the advisory council from 18 members to 25 members by adding one new ex officio member, the Director of the Division of Aging Services in the Department of Human Services, and six new public members. The bill further revises the requirements for the ex officio membership by identifying specific offices and divisions from which certain ex officio members are to be appointed. The bill also revises the requirements for the public membership, which under current law includes a business person, a lay person born of deaf parents, five citizens who are deaf, and five citizens who are hard of hearing. As revised, the public membership will include a licensed audiologist, a licensed speech-language pathologist, an American Sign Language instructor, an educational provider, a business person, a lay person born of deaf parents, one parent of a child who is deaf or hard of hearing, one parent of a child with special needs who is deaf or hard of hearing, two citizens who are deaf-blind, four citizens who are deaf, and four citizens who are hard of hearing. The bill identifies certain requirements for certain of the public members to be appointed variously by the Governor, the Senate President, and the Speaker of the General Assembly.

Under the bill, the advisory council will have the duty to:

1) conduct an ongoing review of the programs, services, and proposed legislation in the State that affects or may affect persons who are deaf, persons who are deaf-blind, and persons who are hard of hearing;

2) provide the Governor, the Legislature, the judicial branch, and the commissioners of all State agencies with advice and recommendations on: a) the development of policies, programs, and services affecting persons who are deaf, persons who are deaf-blind, and persons who are hard of hearing; b) the appropriate use of federal and State money in relation to persons who are deaf, persons who are

deaf-blind, and persons who are hard of hearing; c) the sufficiency of, and deficiencies evident in, the programs, services, and proposed legislation reviewed by the advisory council; d) the new laws, rules, and policies that will be necessary to ensure that persons who are deaf, persons who are deaf-blind, and persons who are hard of hearing have equal access to available programs, services, and benefits; e) the legislation and policies that will work to improve the economic and social conditions of persons who are deaf, persons who are deaf-blind, and persons who are hard of hearing; f) the need for revisions to the State's affirmative action plan and programs, or for any other State action that may be necessary to eliminate the underemployment or unemployment of persons wo are deaf, persons who are deaf-blind, and persons who are hard of hearing in the State's workforce; and g) the problems that are faced by persons who are deaf, persons who are deaf-blind, and persons who are hard of hearing in the areas of education, employment, human rights, human services, health, housing, and other related areas;

3) assist persons who are deaf, persons who are deaf-blind, persons who are hard of hearing, and the parents of minors who are deaf, minors who are deaf-blind, or minors who are hard of hearing, in affirmatively advocating for equal access to services programs, and opportunities;

4) work in consultation with other State and federal agencies and organizations to promote economic opportunities and growth for persons who are deaf, persons who are deaf-blind, and persons who are hard of hearing;

5) research, formulate, and present to the Governor, Legislature, and any appropriate State agencies, plans for new programs, services, and policies that will serve the needs of persons who are deaf, persons who are deaf-blind, and persons who are hard of hearing;

6) encourage and assist in the development of coordinated, interdepartmental goals and objectives, and the coordination of programs, services, and facilities among all State agencies, political subdivisions, and private service providers as they relate to persons who are deaf, persons who are deaf-blind, and persons who are hard of hearing; and

7) enhance public awareness of the special needs and potential of persons who are deaf, persons who are deaf-blind, and persons who are hard of hearing.

The bill also require the advisory council, in effectuating its duties under the bill, to coordinate with other State and local agencies that serve persons who are deaf, persons who are deaf-blind, or persons who are hard of hearing, and to consult with associations, organizations, and individuals who are knowledgeable about the needs of persons who are deaf, persons who are deaf-blind, or persons who are hard of hearing, and the needs of their families.

Finally, the amendments would authorize the advisory council to establish an executive sub-committee and any other sub-committee of its members as it deems necessary or proper, and to authorize such sub-committees to exercise any powers of the advisory council, except those that are expressly required by law to be exercised by the advisory council. The amendments provide that, if the advisory council establishes an executive sub-committee, the sub-committee is to have at least three members appointed by the chair.

COMMITTEE AMENDMENTS

The committee made technical amendments to harmonize certain internal terminology to maintain consistency throughout the provisions of the bill. Specifically, the amendments replace the terms "individuals who are deaf, deaf-blind, or hard of hearing," "persons who are deaf, deaf-blind, or hard of hearing," and "minors who are deaf, deaf-blind, or hard of hearing" with the terms "persons who are deaf, persons who are deaf-blind, or persons who are hard of hearing" and "minors who are deaf, minors who are deaf-blind, and minors who are hard of hearing" and the term "committee" with the term "sub-committee."