Written evidence submitted by Deaf Hope (part of Sign Health Charity)  
(ATW0203)

We are a small team of 7 Deaf specialist workers supporting Deaf women and girls who are experiencing domestic abuse.

Of the team of 7 – 5 of us have been affected by the 30 hour rule and have spent the last 12 months trying to resolve issues with ATW advisers and ensure we have the communication support that matches our needs. 4 of the staff started working with Deaf Hope in the same month. However with different advisors there were contradicting results. Despite all 4 asking for the same number of hours support at the same level (fully qualified interpreters), 2 were approved and 2 were forced to follow the 30 hour ruling. 2 existing staff, including myself, had our allowances cut and forced to adopt the 30 hour ruling and salaried route. This to be shows no consistency or logic with the decisions made.

We have been trying to resolve this for the last year without success. One worker has never been seen by her Advisor, only communicated by telephone via interpreter, and yet was bullied by him on the telephone for an hour and reduced to tears and had to be sent home due to stress. He has insisted and forced her to only use a CSW despite evidence this does not meet her communication needs. She is fluent BSL user and needs a high level voice over. This has seriously affected her ability to work to achieve her targets or to complete her training. This in turn has affected our targets and other members of the team have had to absorb some of her work due to her having no allowance for the appropriate level of interpreting.

Another worker was bullied into accepting a lower number of hours, and sent a form insisting she signed the contract or all her support would be withdrawn, which is pretty much blackmailing her to accept less than what she actually required.

Due to the fact our work is specialist and needing involvement with police, multi agency risk assessment conferences, safeguarding children and adults and is crisis work – we need the flexibility of interpreters to ensure fast response. We found that using one agency and from a select pool of trusted and tried interpreters, not only were all our needs being met, we were also through this agency able to ensure few cancellations and better use of interpreters time and most effective use of our respective allowances.

This agency (Interpreting Matters) has remained loyal to us whilst we are fighting to get all allowance issues resolved. However, ATW have been returning many invoices unpaid and this has affected the agencies ability to pay our interpreters. To date the agency are owed £20k from one worker alone.

I have real concerns that the 30 hour rule situation is affecting our working relationships with not only the agency we use but also the pool of interpreters we use.
It has been really hard for me as a manager to ensure all my workers are fully supported in trying to sort out this ATW issue. I have had to take time to help them challenge decisions, make complaints, talk on their behalf to their respective Advisers and the subsequent appeals, complaints and meetings with MPs. I have also had to review allocations of clients and workloads to accommodate these problems of some workers not having allowances agreed. This in turn impacts on team relationships when some staff have had to absorb other workers cases.

The effect on morale has also been the case and some workers so demoralised and stressed by the ATW issues they just want to stop challenging and accept the 30 hour rule, even if it does not dully meet their needs. They also have the added stress of risk to their jobs due to be unable to meet their targets and fear losing their contracts. No worker should have to work with something like this hanging over them.

As a team we feel angry and let down and also discriminated by ATW in their handling of this situation and the barriers to routes open to resolve the issue. The lack of deaf awareness has been astounding.

20 June 2014