



To: The Unicode Technical Committee

I have been asked to write a letter in support of the proposal prepared by Michael Everson to encode SignWriting symbols in Unicode.

From my perspective as a member of SIL International, it seems to me, and to the other key people in SIL with whom I have discussed the matter, very reasonable to request encoding of the symbol set for SignWriting at this time, even though there is still uncertainty about layout/positioning information. My reasons are:

- The symbol set is mature, stable and well-understood.
- There is currently an XML markup system (SWML) that can be used to represent layout/positioning information. It will be helpful in this system to be able to refer to the symbols themselves using standard Unicode codepoints.
- Having the symbol set in Unicode will facilitate research and development toward the end of incorporating layout/positioning information in a complete encoding.

With regard to the first point, I would like to point out that there is a very recent M.A. thesis by Stuart Thiessen (just posted today) which demonstrates the depth of understanding that exists about the SignWriting symbol set. You can find it at: <http://www.und.edu/dept/linguistics/theses/2011Thiessen.htm>.

In writing this letter, I am, of course, not making any statements about whether a particular sign language community should use SignWriting. I note, however, that people in many different sign languages have been using SignWriting, and having the SignWriting symbol set in Unicode will be a great help to their efforts to write their languages.

Sincerely yours,

J. Albert Bickford, Ph.D.

Director, SIL-UND

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