



# AMERICAN SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF

*Edward F. Peltier, Executive Director*

263

## **Testimony Before the Appropriations Committee December 9, 2009**

To: State Senator Toni Nathaniel Harp, Deputy President Pro Tempore  
State Representative John C. Geragosian, Chair, Appropriations Committee  
From: Edward F. Peltier, Executive Director, American School for the Deaf

Since 1817, the American School for the Deaf and the State of Connecticut have partnered through a state appropriation, to provide educational services to Deaf and Hard of Hearing infants, children and their families throughout the State of Connecticut. Through these many years, ASD has ensured that this typically underserved population receives the education and skills they need to become productive, self-directed, tax-paying citizens.

ASD's appropriation was cut 5% or \$490,000 in the latest round of rescissions. This cut will significantly impact our ability to meet the needs of our students. Many of our students come from Connecticut's urban centers and are economically disadvantaged and have significant special needs and language deficits. Over the years, the needs of Deaf and Hard of Hearing children in the State have markedly changed. Eighty-two percent of our students have at least one other disability in addition to deafness, and 58% of our students qualify for free or reduced lunch under federal guidelines. As part of the long-standing public-private partnership with the State, ASD has assisted the State Department of Education in expanding programs to serve this challenging population. We have the State's only behaviorally disordered program PACES (Positive Attitudes Concerning Education and Socialization) for Deaf and Hard of Hearing students. Without this program, many of these students would be hospitalized or institutionalized, resulting in significant additional cost to the State. While cost effective to the State, these vital programs are expensive to manage.

Deaf children acquire language differently than their hearing counterparts, and language acquisition and literacy pose significant challenges for these students. Additionally, they face significant communication challenges. Our faculty and staff have specific expertise in communication modalities, vocational and life skills training, as well as in traditional academics, and are able to identify and meet the needs of this special group of students. Many of our students attend ASD year round to minimize or eliminate academic and social regression. ASD has a 0% dropout rate and over 90% of our graduates pursue higher education, vocational training or employment.

The partnership between the American School for the Deaf and the State of Connecticut has stood the test of time. We have done everything in our power to provide cost-effective programming. However, collective bargaining agreements and mandated services limit our ability to make substantial cuts. The 5% cut will result in the elimination of staff and the reduction of resources vital to the educational success and support of these students.

We understand the seriousness of the State's fiscal challenges, but strongly urge you to consider the negative impact that additional cuts will have on these special children.

## **American School for the Deaf Makes a Difference**

We would like to illustrate the importance of the ongoing public-private partnership between the State of Connecticut and the American School for the Deaf by telling you the story of one student, "JR". JR came to us as a 3 year-old day student from an impoverished background and extremely unstable family situation.

As in the case of many of our students, JR's family had no knowledge of deafness and did not know sign language. In addition to his deafness, JR had intellectual and behavioral disabilities.

Over the course of the next several years, his family situation continued to deteriorate, and in 2006, JR was removed from his home by the Connecticut Department of Children and Families. DCF struggled with finding an appropriate placement for JR, and the American School for the Deaf proved to be the sole placement which had a 7 day residential program, the resources necessary to deal with his academic delays and disabilities, and was communicationally accessible.

This program's highly structured environment provided JR the support he needed, not only to develop academically, but emotionally as well. The happy ending that this public-private partnership has made possible is that JR is now in the process of being adopted, at the age of 16 ½, by a Connecticut family who loves him and respects him for the fine young man he is.