Connecticut Council of Organizations Serving the Deaf

1745 Asylum Avenue
West Hartford, CT 06117

Honorable Senator Toni Harp and Representative Toni Walker, Co –Chairs, Appropriations and Committee Members:

Thanks for allowing me to testify on behalf of The Connecticut Council of Organizations Serving the Deaf (CCOSD), Inc. I am Susan V. Pedersen, President. CCOSD was established on December 1, 1969 to serve the deaf and hard of hearing residents of Connecticut through their local and autonomous member organizations of or for the Deaf. Currently there are 24 Deaf and Hard of Hearing organizations representing over 1,000 members under CCOSD.

CCOSD had the special meeting last Monday, February 28, 2011 to discuss about the proposed Governor's Bill No. 1012.

We respect, and understand Governor Malloy's decision to reduce the number of agencies across the board, and appreciate his decision to maintain the services of the Commission on the Deaf and Hearing Impaired (CDHI). As you probably know, CCOSD helped advocate for the establishment The Commission on the Deaf and Hearing Impaired has back in May 31, 1974, and we are proud of the essential services that the CDHI has provided for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Individuals throughout the State of Connecticut.

We also appreciate the fact that Governor Malloy sees the importance of maintaining the state commission of 21 members to act as Advisory Board to CDHI for the services it provides to the Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals. Their community input is critical. In addition, the same advisory board would consult with the Department of Social Services (DSS), the newly merged agency if the merge is approved.

We want to emphasize the fact that the CDHI oversees the Special Telecommunications Equipment Fund. CDHI oversees the distribution of the funds to meet the needs of special telecommunications equipment and oversees the message relay services for Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals. However, we are concerned that ten percent of the money paid into the fund is allocated to the Department of Social Services to carry out its administrative responsibilities. We want to be sure that this

funding is used to meet our needs. We also want to point out that CDHI is responsible for making the report to the Federal Communication Commission (FCC) every 5 years of its review of the relay services provided in the State of CT.

In our recent CCOSD meeting last Monday, we also identified several other concerns that we want to present to your attention:

- The Deaf and Hard of Hearing community feels that there should be a Deaf Director for CDHI to advocate for the needs and rights of Deaf, Deaf-Blind and Hard of Hearing individuals and who understands their language, communication needs and culture as the aspects of any ethnical groups.
- We are concerned that the unique services for Deaf and Hard of Hearing people offered by CDHI will not get the attention it deserves under such a large state agency as DSS. We believe that CDHI would be more effective if it is under the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (which is also under DSS) as the BRS has effectively served the needs of Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals across the state throughout the years.
- We are fully aware of the long lines, parking issues, and lack of communication accessibility that occur at DSS offices throughout the State of CT. We would like for this to be taken in consideration if and when moving the offices of CDHI so should it be reduced.
- We also would like to see state offices throughout the state where there is any deaf employee working in the office to have access to a Videophone (VP). While there has been an increase in installation of VPs throughout the professional offices, still many deaf state employees throughout the state have had a hard time accessing this accessible technology due to IT issues. Their clients using the advanced VPs are trying to reach them. This VP provides accessible communication to deaf state employees as well as means of communication with their co-workers and service providers throughout the state.
- We are concerned with the wording "may" in many sections; i.e. under Section 34, where it says that the DSS may provide necessary services....These "may" words should be replaced with the word, *"shall".*
- We have been advocating the change of the name from Commission on the Deaf and Hearing Impaired to **Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing.** Connecticut is one of only two states with a commission that still uses the word "Hearing Impaired." We believe that this is the right time to make the change.

Again, thank you for hearing our concerns and we trust you will do what's right for all Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals living in the State of Connecticut.

www.ccosd.org