

Public Testimony Before the Joint Education Committee
Re: Raised HB 6499: An Act Concerning Minor Revisions to the Education Statutes,
Chapter 164, Section 10-16b to include American Sign Language as a World Language
March 7, 2011

Sen. Andrea Stillman and Rep. Andrew Fleischmann, Co-Chairs:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you and the Committee members about the raised HB 6499: An Act Concerning Minor Revisions to the Education Statutes. I am Dr. Harvey J. Corson, Retired Educator, Vice- President of the Connecticut Association of the Deaf (CAD) and a Core Member of the Statewide Committee on American Sign Language as a World Language.

Today I am speaking in reference to the need to update the statute--Chapter 164, Section 10-16b. In 1989 this education statute was enacted to provide a mechanism for an elective course, sign language, to be offered to secondary students for credit under Language Arts. Some twenty years later we find that Connecticut is the only state that considers sign language as part of Language Arts. According to research, this view is outdated.

As part of the effort to study the need for updating the current statute, a Statewide Committee on American Sign Language as a World Language was established about five years ago to do research on this matter. Two years ago in September 2009, the Statewide Committee developed a Power Point Presentation. This document was shared with the Connecticut Deaf and Hard of Hearing Community. This resulted in nine various organizations serving the Deaf and Hard of Hearing citizens in the state endorsing this need for the updating of the 1989 law. Last year this document was also shared with the Joint Education Committee providing the background information and data indicating the need for the proposed revision.

This proposed revision would enable Connecticut to be in line with the majority of the states, especially in the Northeast, in terms of offering the American Sign Language (ASL) as part of world language electives available to secondary school students.

This proposed revision reflects current research and acknowledgement that the American Sign Language is a language in its own right, not a form of English or part of Language Arts. As of March 2010, 166 colleges and universities accept American Sign Language as a foreign or world language. Accordingly, the phrase "or Signed English" in line 17 on page 2 in the proposed bill should be deleted as part of the updating process.

This revision would provide current and future secondary students the opportunity to select American Sign Language, if offered, as one of world language electives to learn about the language and culture of deaf and hard of hearing people. This may also provide career exploration and preparation for future college students interested in working with deaf and hard of hearing children and adults in various careers such as teachers, interpreters, counselors, health care professionals, social workers,

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researchers, etc. Thus, the pool of needed professionals working with this population would be maintained or increased.

Recently, the USA Today and the New York Times newspapers, in their December 8, 2010 editions, reported that American Sign Language is the fourth most studied foreign language on college campuses according to the 2009 triennial survey conducted by the Modern Language Association. Furthermore, the same survey mentioned the American Sign Language "increased more than 16%" from 2006, reflecting "the growing acceptance of American Sign Language to meet college foreign language requirements and its usefulness as an employment credential".

This would be one of the possible positive outcomes of the proposed legislation.

Thank you for your consideration and support of this proposed revision.