

Madam Chair, Mr. Chairman and members of the Education Committee, my name is Mary Silvestri and I live in Danbury. I am a Deaf mother of three grown Deaf children who graduated from the Danbury public school system. I have been a certified Teacher of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in the Danbury area for 34 years and have taught American Sign Language (ASL) at Danbury High School for 15 years.

I support the section of Raised Bill 6499, "An Act Concerning minor revisions to the education statutes" which would classify American Sign Language as a foreign (world) language as part of the program of instruction in our public schools.

Upon reading the bill, I would suggest two minor changes – "American sign language" should be capitalized (American Sign Language) and "signed English" should be taken out.

Before explaining my reasoning for classifying ASL as a world language, I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to my Legislators, Senator Michael McLachlan and Representative Joseph Taborsak, and their aides, Adam Chiara and Kelley Fournier, for all their help in bringing this matter to your attention. They listened patiently to our concerns and guided us through the Legislative Maze.

The reason for my supporting the minor change in Raised Bill 6499 (which involves no added burden to the state budget) is that the statute needs to be updated to recognize ASL as a world language and not as part of language arts. Most importantly, ASL is considered a language in its own right by linguists.

Teaching ASL in the public schools benefits everyone. Some of my ASL students have gone on to become interpreters, special education teachers, and regular education teachers. I also often bump into former students in my community who then sign to me. Every year in my ASL class, I have students telling me with great excitement that while working, they were able to communicate with a deaf customer. So ASL is a language that can be used immediately in the community.

Although I am already certified as a teacher, I have taken additional training to become a qualified ASL teacher. This involved completing a 15-hour program on ASL teaching sponsored by SLIP (a state ASL teachers group) joining ASLTA (a national ASL teachers group) and earning a second level of ASLTA certification, traveling to Virginia for a four-day workshop on using an ASL textbook, attending a workshop in Connecticut on Foreign Language National Standards as applied to ASL, and most recently taking core ASL teaching classes at Columbia University and receiving an ASL curriculum for high school students.

All my training and experience as an ASL teacher, a teacher of the deaf/hard of hearing and Deaf individual lead me to believe the statute should be updated to classify ASL as a world language.

Thank you for allowing me to present my testimony at this Hearing.

Mary Silvestri
Danbury, CT

March 7, 2011