

Public Testimony to Human Services Committee
Regarding the Merger of
Commission on Deaf & Hearing Impaired and Department of Social Services
March 15, 2011

Honorable Senator Anthony Musto and Representative Peter Tercyak, Co –Chairs, Human Services 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. This organization pushed legislation for the establishment of Commission on Deaf and Hearing Impaired (CDHI) that was implemented on May 31, 1974. 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. Also deaf people asked me to explain this bill last Wednesday evening at Three Rivers Community College in Norwich after the CT Relay Service meeting.

We respect, and understand Governor Malloy’s decision to reduce the number of agencies across the board. We actually appreciate his decision to maintain the services of the CDHI. 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 and you see the importance of maintaining the CDHI Advisory Board of 21 members at the new merger agency that serves the Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals. Their community input is critical. The same advisory board would consult with the Department of Social Services (DSS) and/or the Bureau of Vocational Services (BRS) if the merge is approved.

We want to see new language in Bill 1012 regarding the CDHI overseeing the Special Telecommunications Equipment Fund. The rationale for this change is that the subcontractor of the Department of Public Utilities Control (DPUC) has been responsible for the distribution of the funds to meet the needs of special telecommunications equipment and to operate the message relay services for Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals. Also “Ten percent of the money paid into the fund is allocated to the Department of Social Services to carry out its administrative responsibilities” should be changed. CDHI has no part in it.

For your information, CDHI is only responsible for making the report or review of the relay services provided in the State of CT to the Federal Communication Commission (FCC) every 5 years as mandated.

In our recent CCOSD meeting on February 28 and the briefing at Norwich on March 9, we had discussed and identified several concerns that we want to address:

- **The Deaf and Hard of Hearing community feels that there should be a Deaf Director or the head of CDHI who could 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 service for Deaf and Hard of Hearing people offered by CDHI will not be in the good quality under such a large state agency as DSS. Serving the Deaf and Hard of Hearing will be more effective under the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS) which is also under DSS. The BRS has served Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals across the state throughout the years as well as the other persons with disabilities for 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 office of CDHI so these problems should be resolved.**
- **We also would like to see that all state offices throughout the state where any deaf employees work are equipped with the Videophones (VP). While there has been an increase in installation of VPs throughout the professional offices, still many deaf state employees have had the hard time accessing this accessible technology due to IT issues. Their clients using the VPs are trying to reach them. This VP provides accessible communication to deaf state employees as well as the tool of communication with their co-workers and service providers who do not use sign language.**
- **We would not want the sign language interpreting services reduced or terminated. Please keep it.**
- **Our big concern is that the budget for this deaf and hard of hearing service would be reduced or terminated if the merger is approved. Please do not cut its budget.**
- **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 Deaf and Hearing Impaired to Deaf and Hard of Hearing. Connecticut is one of only two states with a commission that still uses the old word “Hearing Impaired.” We believe that this is the right time to make the change.**

Please invite some representatives of CCOSD to the merger planning committee or group if this transition goes forward. The purpose for this request is safeguarding what is essential, making functions, duties and considerations for deaf consumers sure, and monitoring them so that nothing is overlooked or “lost in the shuffle”.

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. Please vote in favor of this bill #1012.

www.ccosd.org