

Testimony of: Christopher and Lori Packer  
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**SUPPORT OF HB 5357, AN ACT CONCERNING A DEAF CHILD BILLOF RIGHTS**  
Education Committee Hearing  
March 5, 2012

To: The Honorable Fleischman, Co-Chair, The Honorable Stillman, Co-Chair and Members of the Education Committee

Our names are Chris and Lori Packer and we are writing this letter in support of HB 5357, An Act Concerning a Deaf Child Bill of Rights. We are the parents of a daughter who is profoundly deaf and is currently a freshman at a State Technical High School. Her education began at a public elementary school and by third grade she was four years behind her non-hearing impaired peers. The school did not have a teacher experienced in working with a hearing-impaired child, nor were they familiar with the language and communication needs critical to her development. We transferred our daughter to the CREC Soundbridge Program where she remained primarily in a contained classroom for the next 5 years. The failure to accommodate her language and communication deficits hampered our attempts to mainstream her and, as a result, she remains significantly behind her non-hearing impaired high school peers. The extraordinarily wide achievement gap between hearing and non-hearing impaired students is in direct correlation with our daughter's inability to learn at grade level. That gap exists because her language and communication needs were not met, and it's further widened by minimal social integration throughout her elementary and middle school years. She now has the burden of a 5-year high school program and will not graduate with her non-hearing impaired twin sister who is moving forward academically and socially.

We sat through years of PPT meetings along with trial and error teaching methods that would have been less arduous if we had worked from the Deaf Child Bill of Rights. Although the Bill does not include it, there should be a teacher of the deaf/hearing-impaired present at each PPT. This teacher has the education and experience that must be shared with the PPT group to ensure the deaf child's needs are addressed full-circle. An example of this is when our daughter complained daily of static in her hearing aides. Repeated trips to the hearing center showed they were working fine, but her frustration grew and she refused to wear them during school. A teacher of the hearing-impaired later informed us that the static was caused by computer cables running above the ceiling in her classroom. The language and communication plan of HB 5357 which addresses "physical environment accommodations," would have spared our daughter from this awful experience. In another instance, she was struggling in her 7<sup>th</sup> grade social studies class. Three quarters of the way through the school year, it was discovered that she had been given a 9<sup>th</sup>

grade text book because it was what the school had available at the time. Navigating the system was stressful and became more disheartening as we saw our daughter's language and communication needs suffer. The missing piece has been a Deaf Child Bill of Rights, providing specific language to ensure the deaf/hearing-impaired child will be educated in an environment that enables him or her perform to the full extent of their abilities.

When we made the decision to mainstream our daughter into high school we were met with pessimism. The school administrators and other professionals were outspoken with their reservations about her ability to succeed because she was academically behind. They pointed out that the school would not be liable if we enrolled her and she failed. We believe they were intimidated by the lack of clear direction to educate a hearing-impaired student and without a roadmap (something HB 5357 would provide) it appeared a daunting task.

As parents, we must take every step possible to help our children achieve their dreams and help them to become contributing members of society. The Deaf Child Bill of Rights will help achieve that ultimate goal.

It will reassure parents of deaf and hearing-impaired children that their child's language and communication needs will be addressed. It will also ease the burden of the child when he or she begins to participate in their own PPT and IEP process.

The Deaf Child Bill of Rights is another step in our efforts to advocate for our daughter. Good parents will advocate for what's in the best interest of their child regardless of obstacles and hurdles. I urge you to do the same and support HB 5357.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this important Bill.