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SUPPORT FOR BILL 5357

An Act Concerning a Deaf Child Bill of Rights

To: The Honorable Andrew Fleischman, Co-Chair

The Honorable Andrea Stillman, Co-Chair

Members of the Committee on Education

As an educator of children with hearing loss for more than 35 years, a former professor of graduate students in audiology, speech-language pathology, and education of the deaf and hard of hearing, and the author of several books and numerous chapters and articles about helping children with hearing loss to listen and talk, I am writing to ask your support for Raised Bill HB 5357. For the past 6 years, I have been the Director of CREC's Soundbridge program, which provides a broad array of instructional and audiological support services to well over 600 children with hearing loss in more than 100 school districts across the State of Connecticut. We are proud of the fact that over 90 percent of the students we serve are receiving those services in their home school districts, with the remaining 10% requiring intensive and specialized services that we provide in our day programs in Wethersfield.

I would like to bring it to your attention that that "broad array" of services exists for a very good reason: children with hearing loss have very individualized needs, based on the age at which their hearing loss was identified, the age at which they began full-time wearing of appropriate hearing technology, the age at which they and their parents began to receive instructional services, the auditory and learning environment of the child, and the family's choice of communication modality. Those unique needs require specialized educational programming.

Hearing loss is a low incidence disability, representing about 1% of all children receiving special education services. A small district could have 32 children with learning disabilities, 21 with speech and language disorders, 6 with autism, 11 with intellectual disabilities or other developmental delays, and only 1 with a hearing loss. Because there are so few children, most school districts do not have a teacher who has certification in the area of hearing impairment, so that there may be no one with expertise sitting at the table at a Planning and Placement Team (PPT) meeting where a decision is being made which will determine the child's entire education and future. I am advocating for an amendment to this Bill, requiring that a teacher of the hearing-impaired with expertise in the child's chosen mode of communication, be an active and full participant in any PPT where educational programming decisions are being made for a child with hearing loss.

In today's world, given early and appropriate hearing technology and instruction, a child with hearing loss has every chance of learning fluent spoken or sign language which will support him or her socially, academically, and in work or education past secondary school. This Bill

and the Language and Communication Plan will help school districts in that decision-makers on the child's educational team will focus first and foremost on the child's unique language and communication needs. They need to do so guided by knowledge and expertise, so that the educational program of every child with hearing loss will appropriately support the child's learning and achievement. Please help make that happen by voting to support Bill No. 5357.