Thank you for the opportunity to talk to you today about an issue that is very important to me, the Deaf Child Bill of Rights. Thank you especially to Representative Kokoruda for taking the time to meet with me in person. I greatly appreciate that. My name is Joan Weir and I am speaking to you as a parent and an educator who knows firsthand the effects of hearing loss in the educational environment.

Our son, Will, is four years old and was born with a very significant hearing loss. He is currently in his second year of preschool at American School for the Deaf, where he doing well. He entered preschool with an extreme language delay despite early intervention and the consistent use of hearing aids from the age of two months. When it was time to decide where he should go to preschool, my husband and I had to fight to get the town of Madison to agree that ASD was the best placement for Will. It was not that the members of the Planning and Placement Team did not care about what happened to Will; they truly believed they could create an adequate environment in which he could learn, but it became obvious to us during the process that they did not know enough about hearing loss to address Will's needs. It was a case of they did not know what they did not know. Among other things, my son's congenital hearing loss was compared to adult onset hearing loss and the fact that Will needed to be around fluent, consistent signers in order to best learn the language was lost to the team members. If we had not brought a representative from ASD who was able explain the program and the impact of hearing loss to the team, I doubt we would have gotten the placement that was best for Will. If he had not been at ASD, it is doubtful that he would have had the ready access to educational audiologists who were able to determine that his present hearing aids were not giving him full access to the sounds of English. He also would not be surrounded by people who were explicitly teaching the incidental language that is typically picked up through overhearing. Although his language is still delayed, he is doing beautifully because of the expert help he is receiving. His letter and word recognition is advanced and he can use language not only to let us know his wants and needs but to create imaginative stories and boss his older sister and brother around. I have no doubt that soon his language will be at level at which he can be successful in the general education setting, but only if there is someone on his team who can make sure his needs are being met. Including a Language and Communication Plan and a person who is knowledgeable about hearing loss on his team would be a tremendous help.

As an educator, I am also concerned about other children in the state with hearing loss. My husband and I are effective and persistent advocates for Will, but it can be incredibly stressful and it is entirely understandable that some families might not be able to devote the amount of time and energy into investigating educational options for their children and accept that the school districts have the best answer. Unfortunately, hearing loss is a low incidence disability and few, if any, school districts are well versed in the educational impact of hearing loss. Although special education teachers and speech language pathologists are experts in their fields, they are not experts in hearing loss. As a former special education teacher, I can tell you exactly how much training I received in hearing loss; half a page in a textbook and one lecture in which the professor informed us that a child with hearing loss would never be able to read past the fourth grade level. I recently received my master's in Deaf Education from the University of Hartford and despite having just spent a year of intensive study to achieve this, I can honestly say, I still have much to learn about educating children with hearing loss. I do not see how the needs of a child with hearing loss can be addressed by someone who has not been trained in hearing

loss. There is much misunderstanding and many misconceptions about hearing loss and we are doing a disservice to children if we are not providing an expert in the field as a member of their team. As a teacher of the Deaf, I have been able to pick up when a student's cochlear implant needed mapping before it became an issue in the classroom because I have been trained to know what to look for.

My son is a bright, inquisitive child with great potential and he comes from a family who values education. He has a long school career ahead of him and I would hate to think that he will achieve less than he is able to because of his hearing loss. Will deserves the right to do as well in school as a child with typical hearing. Please help to lessen the learning gap between children with hearing loss and those with typical hearing by enacting the Deaf Child Bill of Rights and protecting the right to a free and appropriate public education for children with hearing loss. Thank you for your time.