

Testimony for Raised Bill No. 5357

AN ACT CONCERNING A DEAF CHILD BILL OF RIGHTS

My name is Kathleen DonAroma and I'm the Director of Outreach Education at the American School for the Deaf (ASD). I've been employed as a teacher at ASD, an interpreter with the state of Connecticut Commission for the Deaf and Hearing Impaired and most recently as a Coordinator of Services in public school programs for ASD. In addition, I have volunteered in my community as a Commissioner for the Commission for the Handicapped and a Sign Language Instructor for emergency personnel in New Britain, an ESL instructor for residents new to our country in Farmington, CT. and a Board Member of the recently established Connecticut State Chapter of Hands & Voices, a national parent driven group for promoting educational excellence and resources to families in CT.

I've been fortunate to be raised in a family that includes 15 members of the deaf community in this state. My career in the field of deafness spans 39 years which began at the University of Virginia, an oral/aural program that emphasizes listening and speaking skills. My personal and professional goals were to be able to meet the needs of a broad spectrum of children with hearing loss. This pathway to education is very difficult for families. They are faced with complicated choices from the very beginning. As professionals, we need to be equipped with the necessary tools for educational equality for all deaf and hard of hearing students in this state.

As the Director of Outreach Education, I have been at Planning and Placement Team (PPT) meetings for children with hearing loss and understand the educational support needed for Local Education Agencies (LEAS), public school professional staff and others that provide services to our students. There are towns that prefer to handle all educational needs through their Special Education Department. This approach compromises the educational opportunities that deaf and hard of hearing children deserve in our society. Teachers of the Deaf understand the diverse population of students with hearing loss. Whether it be the technology of Cochlear Implants (CI) and the importance of recording data of expressive language for CI students to be used at their next mapping or a Bi-lingual approach to teaching academics through American Sign Language, there is no "one size fits all" when it comes to the education of this population. I've presented a Communication Plan at PPTs to be certain that each team member is respectful of the student and family in coordinating services that are appropriate in meeting the educational needs of children with hearing loss. In these programs, we see continued monitoring of goals and objectives while achieving success in alignment with student peers. This is due to the participation of all team members in the process that is guided by the Communication Plan.

The passing of the Deaf Child Bill of Rights is crucial to educators and families of deaf and hard of hearing children. This document will promote excellence in education by supporting academic and social integration for deaf and hard of hearing children in their learning environment. I ask that you support Bill No. 5357 to ensure that each and every child in our state has equal access to education and participation in our government. This can be achieved through the passing of the Deaf Child Bill of Rights.

Thank you,
Kathleen DonAroma