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HB 5357 Bill for the Deaf Child Bill of Rights

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

My name is Kristin Dilaj and I am an assistant professor in residence at the University of Connecticut and a pediatric audiologist at the New England Center for Hearing Rehabilitation. I am writing in support of the **HB 5357 Bill** for the Deaf Child Bill of Rights. I believe that this Bill is essential to ensure that a child's language and communication needs are identified and addressed when students enter a school system.

I am an audiologist who works with children who have different types of hearing loss, different degrees of hearing loss, different equipment needs, and different communication needs and modes. I have the pleasure of working with numerous families from the time children are identified and throughout their education. Many times I am asked to advocate for children at their Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings in order to ensure that the needs of the child and the family are being met. Often, the communication needs specific to the student with hearing loss are overlooked by members of the school system. **Staff assume that providing and using technology, such as an FM, is all that is needed to accommodate these students.** This is not the case as while technology provides better access to auditory information in the classroom, it does not restore the child's hearing to that of a normal hearing peer. Students with hearing loss have more difficulty hearing in noise and in quiet even with device assistance.

In addition, **school professionals believe that all students with hearing loss have the same communication needs and language goals.** Once again, this is untrue. Each student with hearing loss has unique needs due to the time of diagnosis, degree of hearing loss,

type of device they use, and current speech and language skills. When discussing communication and language development, the school systems often explain that they are capable of providing services because they have a speech language pathologist in their school system. Often this person is untrained with regard to working with this specialized population. As a result, the services provided and the monitoring of the students with hearing loss are often inadequate and can lead to poorer performance in academics. We have seen this reflected in CMT and CAPT scores. These scores show deaf/hard of hearing children with IEPs are significantly behind in reading, writing and math as compared to their hearing peers. **In 2011, between 71% - 81% of deaf/hard of hearing children did NOT reach goal for CMT & CAPT assessments** as compared to 35% - 58% of their hearing peers.

As a professional that works with students with hearing loss on a daily basis, I have seen the success stories. Success comes from educated parents and school systems who are motivated to learn about the child's current communication strategies, motivated to work on language development, and motivated to put together a comprehensive plan to allow students access to academics as well as access to social communication with peers. Students that receive proper services from the start of their education are able to reach their potential and become functioning members of society. Students that do not receive appropriate services immediately upon entering a school system are at a disadvantage; they perform more poorly academically, need increasing services as they continue their education, and need services post high school. The Deaf Child Bill of Rights will provide an opportunity for **equal access to appropriate services for all students with hearing loss**. This Bill will require that appropriate services and an appropriate communication plan are put in place for students with hearing loss, increasing their chances for success in the future.

A Language & Communication Plan attached to every deaf/hard of hearing child's IEP will focus the team during the IEP meeting on identifying and meeting each child's unique language and communication needs. The ultimate goal is to close the unacceptably wide

achievement gap for these children by focusing on meeting their language and communication needs. Passing the HB 5357 will be an important step in closing this gap.