

March 2, 2012

To the Co-Chairs, Representative Andrew Fleischmann and Senator Andrea Stillman, and to the members of the Education Committee,

My name is Mary Silvestri. I'm from Danbury and have been a Teacher of the Deaf/Hard of Hearing in the Danbury public schools for 35 years and have three Deaf children who are now adults. I am Deaf myself.

I wish to express my support for HB 5357, An Act Concerning a Deaf Child Bill of Rights. Before continuing, I'd like to express thanks to my legislators, Senator Michael McLachlan and Representative Joseph Taborsak and their legislative aides, Adam Chiara and Kelley Fourier, for their help and support in following this bill and also in the procedure for testifying.

The "Deaf Child Bill of Rights" will help close the wide achievement gap for children who are deaf/hard of hearing (DHH) because of the requirement for PPT teams to include a "Language and Communication Plan" for DHH students. When I was first shown the "Language and Communication Plan" two years ago by a state group focusing on the educational needs of DHH students, I immediately saw the value of the document and was enthusiastically promoting it in PPTs in Danbury last year. I received mixed reactions to the "Language and Communication Plan" primarily because it was not mandated. By not being mandated, there was little interest in using it. If it was mandated for PPT teams to discuss the "Language and Communication Plan" at every PPT meeting, DHH students would achieve higher academic scores in our school systems since their reading levels would be much better.

Thank you for holding this Hearing and providing me with the opportunity to express my support of this Bill.