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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,
and Members of the Education Committee,

Our names are Patti and Manny Silva and we are writing this letter in support of Bill HB 5357, An Act Concerning a Deaf Child Bill of Rights. We are the parents of a beautiful thirteen year old daughter named Bella, who has hearing loss and an intellectual disability. Bella was born with Down Syndrome, but her hearing loss was not diagnosed until she was in first grade. Up until that time, we were just beginning to learn how to navigate through the daunting world of special education. Trying to understand your child's Individualized Education Program and ensuring that it is tailored to provide the greatest opportunity for your child's success can be more difficult than learning a new language. Adding the hearing loss component to the mix, was akin to attempting to find your way through uncharted territory in a foreign land. Because hearing loss is a low-incidence disability, schools are often not accustomed to meeting the needs of our children. So, not only do you find yourself in a strange land, not knowing the language, but there is no one to guide you safely through.

A Deaf Child Bill of Rights requiring a Language and Communication Plan would provide a comprehensive roadmap designed to increase successful outcomes, not only for families of children who are deaf or hard of hearing, but also for the educators who work with them. Passage of this bill would be a positive step in the right direction of closing the achievement gap for students who are deaf or hard of hearing, thus aligning alongside Governor Malloy's proposed educational reform initiatives.

We believe that there should be a provision in the Deaf Child Bill of Rights ensuring that each child's chosen language and communication mode is respected, along with a data tracking system to track their achievement. We would also request that language be added to the bill requiring that a teacher of the deaf/hearing impaired be present at each PPT. Meeting the individual language and communication needs of each child who is deaf or hard of hearing is vital to their success, and including these measures would further increase more positive outcomes.

We thank you for your time and hope you will consider supporting this bill with the suggested additions.

Respectfully,

Patti & Manny Silva