

Ruth and Bill Ennis
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SUPPORT for Bill 5357 An Act Concerning a Deaf Child Bill of Rights

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

Our names are Ruth and Bill Ennis 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 daughter with a mild to moderately-severe hearing loss. When our daughter was diagnosed with a hearing loss at birth we knew nothing about hearing loss, communication plans, communication modes or deaf culture. We enrolled her with the Birth to Three Program at the American School for the Deaf in West Hartford to provide her language through a total communication approach, using spoken language and sign language to help our child learn. For three years we attended and followed through with aural habilitation therapy while trying to learn sign language in evening courses. Our daughter thrived and we were pleased to see her succeed with only little language delays compared to her hearing peers. At three her educational care transferred from ASD to the local board of education and we embarked yet again on a journey we did not expect. Instead of continuing our work with our daughter we suddenly found ourselves in heated discussions with the board of education in our town who tried to explain that they knew what was best for our daughter educational success even though they had limited experiences with hearing impaired children. We were told that sign language was a philosophy. It took months of arguing, meetings, and the involvement of our lawyer to come to an agreement with our town and an IEP that reflected somewhat the communication we used with our child.

Parents should not need to go through prolonged battles with their local school board in order to receive appropriate communication modes for their hearing impaired child! Instead the time and energy should be spent creating an IEP that is truly fitting the individual child with all their unique needs. This Bill of Rights will assure parents of deaf and hard of hearing children that their children's language and communication needs will be met, so they can become successful members of society. As parent we want our children to be successful in school and ultimately in life. Please support Bill HB 5357 to grand this opportunity for children with hearing loss.

Thank you for allowing us to share our experience with you.