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SUPPORT for Bill 5357: Deaf Child Bill of Rights

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

We are writing this letter in support Bill HB 5357, An Act Concerning a Deaf Child Bill of Rights. We are the very proud parents of two children, one of which is deaf. Our son passed his new born hearing screening, but by the time he was 3 he was considered hard of hearing with moderate to severe hearing loss bi-laterally. By the time he entered kindergarten, he was diagnosed with severe to profound hearing loss. We wanted to ensure that our son had access to communication. Since he was born with hearing he had access to language at a very young age. In addition to speaking, he also uses American Sign Language (ASL) to communicate and gain access in school.

Do you remember what it was like to sit in a classroom in school? Your teacher introducing new information, your classmates talking and answering questions. Now imagine trying to acquire all of this information and participate in conversations if you were deaf / hard of hearing? Everyday our son struggles with new content and participating in the daily routine of school. We recognized immediately that we were going to have to become strong advocates for our son to ensure that he had equal access to information in school.

Initially our hometown school did not want to incorporate ASL as part of our sons Individual Education Plan (IEP). We were informed that the schools philosophy was oral only communication. We also realized that there was a lack of training and understanding in deaf education. This was not acceptable to us! We are strong advocates for our children. Understanding the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and what services our son was entitled to was very important. It took time, but we were able to convince our district that our son's language and communication needs had to be incorporated into his IEP. Today, our son works with a Teacher of the Deaf in his classroom, all of his classmates are learning ASL with him, and the school has included ASL in both the Art and Music programs. This is a success story that other districts can work to emulate.

Public schools need to better understand the language and communication needs of children that are deaf/hard of hearing. Please support Bill HB 5357! By supporting the Deaf Child Bill of Rights, you will help to ensure that all children who are deaf / hard of hearing will have equal access to a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE).

Thank you

