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To: HSTestimony
Subject: Bill 6765

To: Members of the Human Services Committee

My name is Rebecca Haines. I have been a Teacher of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (057) since 1991. I am also a certified Interpreter for the Deaf and have been working in the profession of interpreting for 30 years.

It is imperative that we raise the standards for Educational Interpreters. Bill 6765 does this. The State of Connecticut has adopted the Common Core State Standards, with the goal of better preparing our children for college and careers. Deaf/Hard of Hearing students need skilled interpreters in order to access the curriculum so they, too, can achieve this goal. The current requirements to interpret in the educational setting are not stringent enough. We cannot continue to compromise the education of our deaf/hard of hearing students by limiting their access to an education. If you want children to learn to problem solve, which is the purpose of the CCSS, they must know what the problem is. Again, this requires a skilled interpreter.

I have personally witnessed the success that deaf children can experience when they have skilled interpreters. Unfortunately, I have also witnessed the distress, frustration, and long-term ill effects on very capable deaf/hard of hearing children when they have ineffective interpreters. I have witnessed the child being blamed for not understanding the curriculum even though "you have an interpreter". Many of these students do NOT have interpreters. They have someone signing at them. In such cases, the deaf child does NOT have access, and certainly not equal access, to the curriculum.

For the interpreters who are currently working in the preK-12 setting who do not meet the minimum requirements of Bill 6765, there is a 2 year time frame to allow them time to seek training and become qualified. This is a sufficient amount of time for these individuals to achieve the minimum standard outlined in the legislation. In fact, it is my hope that a third phase will eventually be added to Bill 6765, requiring a 4.0 on the EIPA.

This bill does not in any way compromise the PPT/IEP process. The priority of the IEP is the law and Bill 6765 does not change that fact. If the PPT determines that an interpreter is an appropriate related service provider, then the interpreter needs qualifications well beyond what is currently required. Whether or not the interpreter has other titles does not change the fact that if said person is interpreting, they should be qualified to do so.

A Deaf child who has an interpreted education is already at a disadvantage compared to their hearing peers who receive direct instruction. We should not be putting these children at a further disadvantage. Bill 6765 will ensure that deaf children have better access to instruction than is currently the case.

The Human Resource Departments in most school districts have neither the ability nor the knowledge to evaluate interpreters; they are NOT equipped to hire and terminate interpreters. The Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf neither screens nor evaluates interpreters for school systems. The school systems need guidelines to help them determine if an interpreter is qualified, just as they have guidelines provided by the state to determine if a teacher is qualified. Bill 6765 provides guidelines to the schools regarding Educational Interpreters.

I encourage you to pass Bill 6765 to ensure that Deaf/Hard of Hearing children have better access to their education.

Thank you.

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