

Dear Representative Fleischmann, Senator Slossberg, and esteemed members of the Education Committee:

Please support HB 5679 -- legislation that would require enhancing our audiometric screenings for students in order to improve identification of hearing loss.

Falling through the cracks is what can happen to many students in our educational system, and it happened to my son who was born profoundly deaf in 1992. Although this was pre-newborn hearing screening, my work as an advocate and leader of a nonprofit chapter of the Hearing Loss Association of America (supporting preteens, teens, and young adults) has exposed me to countless stories from others whose hearing loss was not identified for months or even years. The consequences of undetected hearing loss are many, including delayed speech and language acquisition leading to lags in academic achievement.

Even newborns can slip through the cracks since over 20% of children in CT who fail the newborn hearing screening will be lost to follow up according to the 2013 data from the Department of Public Health. Another critical point is that many children develop hearing loss after birth or have a progressive loss over time. What's most distressing now is that adolescents are developing hearing loss from so many being "plugged in" to noisy electronics or being exposed to loud band instruments, for example. In fact, studies show that 1 in 5 adolescents who were 12-19 years old had hearing loss in 2005-06. These numbers are climbing at an alarming rate.

In an effort to avoid children with hearing loss from falling through the cracks, please consider adding the following language to the current bill to require audiometric screenings under these special circumstances: (1) children attending a public preschool program, (2) students who are newly enrolled in a school and have not screened during the previous twelve months, (3) students receiving special education and related services, (4) students referred by a teacher or other school personnel, (5) students who were referred for an audiometric screening but have not had a follow up, (6) students who were absent during the audiometric screening, (7) students who are at greater risk for noise exposure, including but not limited to, students participating in band or enrolled in a technical high school, (8) students who request an audiometric screening, (9) students whose parents request an audiometric screening, and (10) students who cannot be screened to be referred for a complete medical and audiometric evaluation.

By supporting this important legislation that would help detect hearing loss as early as possible, children may obtain early intervention services leading to improved language abilities and greater success academically as well as in their overall social-emotional growth.

I strongly urge you to support HB 5679.

Thank you,  
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