Good Afternoon. I stand before you today as the Executive Director at the American School for the Deaf, and I am grateful for the State of Connecticut’s support of our students.

ASD provides a culturally, linguistically, sensory-accessible environment ideal for deaf, hard of hearing, and hearing non-verbal students. We support students with diverse communication needs by providing a strong language foundation from which they can learn and grow, regardless of their preferred communication approach. Our population includes deaf and hard of hearing students, hearing non-verbal students on the autism spectrum, and students struggling with emotional and/or behavioral challenges. Working together with parents and local school districts, ASD staff develop Individualized Education Plans designed to meet the unique needs of each student.

I am here today to ask for a $2.5 million restoration to ASD’s appropriation. ASD’s appropriation from the State of Connecticut supports the operation of our Core academic program, especially ASD’s teaching, professional, and support staff. Due to several critical cuts from the State over the past four years (in excess of $2.5 million), ASD was forced to reduce our staff by 32% and close several programs.

There has been a paradigm shift in the demographics of students enrolled at schools for the deaf. Many ASD students have special needs in addition to hearing loss. This requires increased staff, specialized credentials and qualifications, and small class size. Deaf and hard of hearing students also require greater communication access to successfully learn, which is impossible to achieve in crowded classrooms.

At ASD, we provide our students with the tools to be ALL ways able – ready to embark on the next phase of their lives with comprehensive post-secondary transition plans. All Pre-K – 12 curriculum offerings are
aligned with Common Core competencies in all grade levels, as established by the Connecticut State Department of Education.

We are proud of our **100% graduation rate**.

ASD is the *only* educational resource in the State offering a bilingual approach to education. ASD embraces an American Sign Language/English Bilingual approach that provides students with a dual language foundation in American Sign Language and English (written and spoken). This approach integrates American Sign Language, Listening and Spoken Language, auditory training, reading, writing, and the use of assistive devices.

As a result of the closing of CREC Soundbridge’s Elementary and Middle School Academy programs, ASD is now the only educational option available exclusively for Connecticut’s deaf and hard of hearing children from birth through high school. These students deserve access to a barrier-free education. ASD provides this access – but we cannot do it alone. We need your support, and the continued financial support provided through our annual appropriation.

At our current funding levels, ASD does not have the capacity to support the anticipated increased demand for our services. It is for this reason that I respectfully request an increase to ASD’s annual appropriation for the FY2019 – 20 and FY2020-21 school years.

ASD – By The Numbers:

- 67% of our students are Connecticut residents
- 70% of students qualify for free or reduced lunch
- 17% of ASD students have multiple disabilities
- This school year, we are operating at a deficit in excess of $2.5 million

Since 1817, our state’s leaders have answered the call to support ASD and our mission. I sincerely hope you will continue this tradition by fighting for an increase to our appropriation. Thank you.