



Jeffrey S. Bravin, Executive Director

139 North Main Street, West Hartford, CT 06107-1269 (Toll-Free) 1-800-244-0420 (Voice) 860-899-1217 (Fax) 860-570-2293 www.asd-1817.org

State of Connecticut Committee on Human Services
March 25, 2021
Written Testimony by Jeffrey S. Bravin, Executive Director
American School for the Deaf

To the Committee on Human Services:

As the Executive Director at the American School for the Deaf in West Hartford, CT, I am writing to ask you to support the Mental Health Bill (H.B. 6637). This bill would establish a statewide mental health services program to provide mental health services tailored to the specialized needs of Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing individuals.

Founded in 1817 as the nation's first special education school, the American School for the Deaf is a comprehensive learning community that welcomes all Deaf, DeafBlind, Hard of Hearing, and Hearing children with unique communication needs. We develop the whole child – intellectually, emotionally, physically, and socially. ASD is a leader in providing innovative programs and services for deaf and hard of hearing students, empowering them to become educated and self-directed lifelong learners.

The Mental Health Bill takes important steps toward ensuring that Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and DeafBlind children and adults receive the support services that they need to succeed. Because deafness, hearing loss, and deafblindness are low-incidence, many service providers are unfamiliar with the unique needs of these populations. It is for this reason that I, and many of my colleagues across the country, are committed to the passing of the Mental Health Bill (H.B. 6637).

The Mental Health Bill will provide for the delivery of essential mental health services to Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing people across the State. This Bill will ensure that:

- Mental health services will be delivered to Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing individuals through appropriate communication and language modes;
- A bill of rights for Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing persons in need of mental health services will be established;
- In order to deliver services in accordance with these rights, the Commissioners of Mental Health and Addiction Services, Developmental Services, Social Services, Children and Families, Aging and Disability Services and Education will establish a state-wide mental health services program for Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing persons;



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- The Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, The Department of Developmental Services, The Department of Social Services, The Department of Children and Families, The Department of Aging and Disability Services, The Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind shall assign not less than one staff member from each respective agency to implement provisions for issues including consultation, training, use of resources, and establishment of health standards;
- An Advisory Committee will be established to 1) identify gaps in the provision of services, necessary resources and funding, and 2) assist in long-range planning to serve the mental health needs of deaf, deafblind and hard of hearing individuals; and
- The sum of one hundred thousand dollars will be appropriated to the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, from the General Fund, for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2022, for startup costs relating to the establishment of a state wide mental health services program for persons who are Deaf, DeafBlind or Hard of Hearing.

I sincerely hope that you will consider supporting the Mental Health Bill (H.B. 6637). In the past year, it has been clear that access to mental health services is of critical importance for everyone. Ensuring this access for Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing people throughout the State of Connecticut is an urgent matter.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey S. Bravin
Executive Director