

Public Testimony Presented to the Joint Committee on Human Services
Regarding Raised Bill No. 6637– An Act Concerning State-wide Mental Health Services for Deaf,
DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing Persons

March 25, 2021

Senator Moore & Representative Abercrombie, Co-Chairs & Members of the Human Services Committee:

I am Dr. Harvey Corson, Member of the Task Force on Mental Health Services for Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing Individuals and Chair of Education & Legislative Committee of the Connecticut Association of the Deaf.

This Task Force came into being as a result of the discussion of concerns and priorities that were raised in the previous meetings of the State Advisory Board for Persons Who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing during 2019. We completed our work and on February 7, 2020 we presented to this Board a brief background and rationale for the proposed legislation: *Statewide Mental Health Services for Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing Individuals Act*. This proposed legislation has been endorsed by this State Advisory Board.

Connecticut landscape of existing mental health services provide the some of the following observations:

- No organized oversight related to the competency of community-based providers of mental health services appropriate for deaf and hard of hearing clients;
- Culturally and linguistically competent in-patient (hospital level of care) treatment settings for deaf and hard of hearing children and adults are non-existent;
- In-patient treatment for deaf and hard of hearing children and adults is minimally effective due to a lack of interpreting services being provided extensively during the in-patient stay, because patients are unable to engage in treatment options (individual, group, and family);
- Deaf and hard of hearing children experience significant mental health treatment delays, often resulting in extended periods of time in emergency departments where communication and treatment accessibility are non-existent;
- Situation is much worse for deafblind children and adults;
- Connecticut no longer has a unified collaborative “center” of services for deaf and hard of hearing individuals.

Accordingly, the Task Force recommends this proposed legislation to address the critical need for appropriate statewide mental health services for low-incidence and underserved population of deaf, deafblind and hard of hearing children and adults in the State of Connecticut.

The Task Force members understand the fiscal constraints that the State of Connecticut is currently facing. Accordingly, it is proposed that a Statewide Mental Health Services Program

for Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing Individuals be formed consisting of six (6) key state agencies:

- Mental Health & Addiction Services;
- Developmental Services;
- Social Services;
- Children & Family Services;
- Aging & Disability Services, Bureau of Education & Services for the Blind;
- Education.

with the Department of Mental Health & Addiction Services (DMHAS) as the Lead Agency whereby these agencies shall pool appropriate resources and funds to provide for agency collaboration, leadership and programming in the provision of mental health services throughout the State.

In closing, the three important points about this proposed legislation which need to be emphasized are:

1. There is a definite need to have a continuing state mechanism to provide appropriate statewide mental health services to low-incidence and underserved population of deaf, deafblind and hard of hearing children and adults in the State of Connecticut.
2. There is now no place in the state government for deaf, deafblind or hard of hearing citizens, parents/family members or the general public to go to ask for information, assistance or present their concerns regarding mental health services availability, issues, qualifications, or performance. Thus, this proposed State-wide Mental Health Program Services for Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing Persons mechanism would serve as the place to get information, assistance or seek resolution for some concerns or issues.
3. This would be done at a more reasonable cost to the state with the involvement of six key state agencies in this state-wide mechanism and the participation of knowledgeable consumer volunteers and agency and service provider representatives on the Statewide Advisory Committee to address the mental health needs of the identified populations to be served.

The Connecticut Association of the Deaf supports this Raised Bill No. 6637. Thank you for your consideration and support.