



# STATE OF CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Public Hearing Testimony  
Human Services Committee  
March 25, 2021



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**To:** Sen. Marilyn Moore, Chair  
Rep. Catherine Abercrombie, Chair  
Sen. Eric Berthel, Ranking Member  
Rep. Jay Case, Ranking Member  
Distinguished Members of the Human Services Committee

**From:** Vanessa Dorantes, Commissioner  
Department of Children and Families

**Re:** Raised HB 6637, An Act Concerning State-Wide Mental Health Services for Deaf, Deaf-Blind and Hard of Hearing Persons

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The Department of Children and Families (DCF) provides the following comments regarding Raised House Bill 6637, which would establish a state-wide mental health services program to provide mental health services tailored to the specialized needs of deaf, deaf-blind and hard of hearing persons.

DCF is the state's lead agency on children's behavioral and mental health services. The Department has built a broad service array to provide care to children struggling with these issues and to help their parents navigate a complex system of care. We have also worked to reduce the stigma associated with mental health treatment and believe that children and their families should feel as comfortable seeking this assistance as they do when needing medical care. Accordingly, if families are attempting to access the mental health system, it is critical that we accommodate any physical or health-related need of the recipients.

There currently exists within DCF a Statewide Deaf and Hard of Hearing Advisory Council that reviews the needs of DCF-involved persons who are deaf or hard of hearing and improves supports for our staff in servicing this population. This includes our child protection activities and internal procedures regarding access to sign language interpreters, text telephone (TTY) services or audio enhancement equipment. The Council meets monthly and is comprised of both internal and external partners. They have also recently begun discussions about creating a training program for staff on how to best accommodate persons who are deaf. We believe this bill would be duplicative of these efforts and is unnecessary.

It is also important to note that Raised Bill 6637 focuses on mental health services for this population, requiring various state agencies to have, at a minimum, a full-time employee dedicated to these services. Over the years, there have only been a handful of times when a hearing-impaired caregiver or child receiving mental health services required interpreting services through DCF. We were able to offer the interpreting services through a list of providers that we maintain. Contracted mental health

providers are familiar with DCF procedures and collaborate to resolve any potential barrier that is presented. Given the small population of hearing-impaired individuals who are served by DCF, it would be fiscally imprudent to dedicate one staff member to oversee this work.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to testify.