

Kester Horn-Marsh  
Oral Proponent – SB444

Good afternoon.

I am respectfully addressing this body as a former Cub Scout leader of the now extinct Pack 3487 from the Kansas School for the Deaf, a current Assistant Scoutmaster of Troop 86 in Olathe, Kansas, and as an Associate Advisor of Venture Crew 2086 in Olathe. I have been the ASL interpreter for these Scouts for over 10 years now for every meeting, camp out, high adventure base, and merit badge lesson. I would like to share my experiences as a Scout leader of Deaf individuals. First of all, my grandparents were Deaf. My parents are Deaf. My aunts and uncles and cousins, nieces and nephews are all Deaf. I have one hearing cousin, a hearing son, and two hearing daughters, but I also have a Deaf daughter and a Deaf son. We have a deaf gene running in our family. My first language is ASL. My second language is English. I am bilingual. However, I am addressing you in English because I want you to really hear what I'm saying. I have a master's degree in Deaf Education from KU. I taught ASL in the public school system to hearing children for 6 years and taught English to Deaf students for 7 years in a school for the Deaf. I am also an American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter. I work with Deaf children and Deaf adults every day of my life, so I know when I see people who did not have language access during the critical period of life.

I am an Eagle Scout myself from Troop 86, the first Boy Scout Troop in Olathe, established exactly 86 years ago. The second troop to be established in Olathe was Troop 87 from KSD, comprised solely of Deaf boys. I grew up hearing and experiencing the stories of how all the other hearing troops in the Kansas City area hated to compete in the annual Klondike sled race because, "The Deaf troop always won!" That was a time when there was a large population of Deaf students in Kansas due to the Rubella outbreak. There were many signing parents in the Olathe area, and the boys who did not have signing parents lived in the dormitory where they had a critical mass of signers in which to acquire both English and ASL. Troop 87 produced 31 Eagle Scouts before disbanding in the 1990s. There was so much success because these boys, simply put, had access to both ASL and English.

Marty Fahncke, a father of a Deaf Scout, and I reopened a charter for Cub Scout Pack 3487 in 2005. As leaders, we had over 25 Deaf Cub Scouts file through that pack in 5 years. Only 17 of them made it into Boy Scout Troop 86, a troop of both Deaf and hearing Boy Scouts. Of these 17, only 3 have made it to Eagle Scout. Nationally, only 2 percent of Boy Scouts make it to Eagle Scout. My son is one of 3 Deaf Boy Scouts who earned their Eagle Scout award in 2015. So, why did these 3 out of 25 earn the ultimate award in Scouting while so many others did not? Because they had access to both English and ASL since birth. Why did 2 out of these 3 Eagle Scouts win a \$2,500 college scholarship by winning a state oratorical contest? Because they had access to both English and ASL since birth. Why did 2 of 3 Eagle Scouts win multiple first prizes in the ASL Bowl Contest? Because they had access to both English and ASL since birth. Why have all 3 declared a college or university upon graduation from high school? Why are all 3 boys now staff members in the annual disabled youth deer hunt in Osceola, Missouri? Because they had access to both English and ASL since birth. Why have these boys been to Philmont, New Mexico, Rocky Mountain National Park, Colorado, the Boundary Waters Canoe Area in Canada, and to Sea Base in Florida? Why have all 3 boys earned their Brotherhood in Order of the Arrow and paint elevations in the Tribe of Mic-O-Say (honorary camping societies)? Why have these three boys gone on to continue leadership in their Boy Scout Troop and Venture Crew, earning multiple Eagle Palms? It's all because they had access to both English and ASL since birth.

Language deprivation for Deaf and Hard of Hearing children is an epidemic of epic proportions not just in Kansas, not just in America, but all over the world. This is not a new problem. It has been going on for generation after generation after generation. When will it stop? How will it stop? Successful bilingual Deaf people know the answer. It's a no-brainer for them. As with any kind of education, it starts with assessment. When all D/HH children are assessed in both English and in ASL so that their language development can be tracked according to established milestones, then they can be provided appropriate intervention services to make sure they are kindergarten ready. To me the math is very clear: The more

Deaf and Hard of Hearing kids that are kindergarten ready, the more Deaf Eagle Scouts we produce as a society. You can help make this happen by voting to pass this bill.

Thank you.