

# United Way of Leavenworth County



As Executive Director of United Way of Leavenworth County and on behalf of the Board of Directors, I am writing to express our support of SB 444, *Creating a language assessment program for children who are deaf or hard of hearing*. United Way's efforts are focused on improving the Income stability, Health, and Education of our communities.

Early childhood education and school readiness is the cornerstone for future success. By age 3, a child's brain has reached more than 85% of its adult weight. When young children are surrounded by a stimulating and enriching environment, brain development is optimized, paving the way for children to enter school ready to learn. During this crucial developmental time, children form the "wiring" needed to think and communicate. Young children without these skills enter school at a disadvantage and are less likely to excel academically in the years to come. Research shows the preschool-age years are critical for cognitive and social development, laying a foundation for success in college, work, and life. Unfortunately, graduation and employment statistics within the deaf and hard of hearing community are tragically low. Recognizing language milestones and benchmarks during the formative years will give these students access to the same opportunities for success as their peers.

United Way's across the country are recognizing that safety net and assistance programs are stretched to their limits, often unable to provide anything more than a temporary solution or simply delaying continued dependence. While these programs are vital to the well-being of our communities, it is through preemptive solutions that identify causation and ultimately prevent the demand for these programs that we can make a difference. SB444 addresses a root cause of dependence on these programs and allows for interventions that can change the course for the individual and entire communities.

United Way of Leavenworth County commends the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community for their courage to stand up and advocate for their needs. While recognizing that current programs and policies have failed to provide them with the opportunities they deserve as Kansans they have developed a solution that will allow those very same programs to maximize their impact and effectiveness. SB444 does not replace or supersede the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) and Individualized Education Plan (IEP), but instead offers an enhancement. While a family still has the right to choose the educational method and approach for their child, now they will be provided a ruler with which to measure their child's progress.

SB444 is an opportunity to ensure that deaf and hard of hearing children are given every opportunity to develop the skills necessary to maximize their own education. With early language acquisition, these children can become students of the world around them contributing to the welfare of our communities rather than being forced to rely on assistance programs for years to come.

Thank you for your consideration and support.  
Sincerely,

Tim Anderson  
Executive Director  
United Way of Leavenworth County