

Chriz Dally's Presentation Notes for PowerPoint presentation on SB 444:

1st Slide

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for the opportunity to be heard. SB 444 is a bill where many stakeholders were involved in building the idea of this bill, including deaf/hh people, parents, educators and those with expertise in language development. Before the bill's introduction, these ideas were shared with Kansas's Commission of DHH, School for the Deaf, KSDE, and department of health and environment, which houses the Early Interventions and Sound Beginning programs.

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Now, what exactly is the problem? Language delays and deprivation, which is something KSDE have known for years but had done nothing about it. When State of California published comprehensive data, in 2008, this gave us the means to clearly illustrate the problem in which Kansas can relate. English Language Arts testing shows that 12,000 D/HH students from K to 12 are seriously behind, 77% Deaf and 49% hard of hearing have below and far below basic skills. In Kansas, while we don't have the data on all D/HH students, we do have a snapshot on KSDE's website showing 85.4% KSD students are way behind in English. What is important to understand that these deaf and hard of hearing children are fully capable of achieving the same levels of language skills in English just as equally as others who can hear if only we had an program that is focused on making sure that language acquisition is happening in the child's earliest years of life which is so, so important.

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Language deprivations have caused a great harm and resulted in in 80% being unemployed and depending on government assistance for survival. Are these statistics acceptable? No! We are fed up and that is why we are stepping up here and asking for your help! Language is a Human Right for everyone and language leads to productive lives and participation in all aspects of society affairs. And this is where you can help to protect their right to language.

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So, what is the solution? A creation of standardized and timely language assessment program to be incorporated within our state's current educational system and meets special education laws where doing assessments and communication plans are required anyways. The problem now is that they are just not uniform or consistent across the system. We need a concentrated focus to monitor and track the child's language development from ages 0 to 8. In other words, we intend this bill to BEEF up the current system that specifies the intervals of assessments, the tools to be used, and importantly, who within the system are uniquely qualified to perform assessments. Also we want to encourage the discussion of assessment results during IFSP and IEP meetings to help parents see how their child is doing in meeting expected language milestones.

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Now, in the area of language assessments, what is important to know that there are only two recognized languages in the education of the Deaf: ASL and English. These two are languages in their own right such as French, Spanish and Chinese are. It has ALWAYS been the intention of our bill to recognize these two languages equally. For opposition to say that the bill is biased, then they are not understanding the differences between language and communication modality. Communication modality is the expression of a language, and there are many under English, which includes spoken English, and signing in SEE, which means Signed Exact English. To be clear, all communication modalities are included in this bill and assessments will be delivered in their communication mode to assess their language skills in ASL, English, or both. Remember, the bottom-line goal for all students is for them to become fully literate.

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So, the heart of this bill has 3 components. First, as explained, is the language assessment program as discussed. Secondly, this bill establishes an Advisory Committee, which pulls together stakeholders, experts who know and understand D/HH and language issues, and all programs/ departments who work with this target population. I have full confidence that this committee will enact the most efficient guidance, using available resources, to beef up our current system. Last, but not least, we need the release and publication of aggregated data specific to D/HH kids progress in language milestones to hold the system accountable and inform us of ways to strengthen if needed. This bill is straight-forward and does not intend to cost the state much money.

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In the last two weeks since the bill was introduced, we have made improvements based on the voices of all groups and stakeholders to make this bill stronger and clearer, as seen in amendments. This bill ensures availability of all language and communication modality options. This bill in no way mandates the parent to ASL assessment if they don't want it and they are already protected under Special Education laws pertaining to Parents Rights. This bill will do much to enhance KSDE and department of health/ environment in the services they provide to D/HH children and their families. And, unique in this bill is the role of the D/HH commission, those statues include authority to coordinate and maintain data. They will not operate as a silo as other departments might and their involvement is very appropriate as they thoroughly know all D/HH issues including education.

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As you have seen with the statistics, which is a crime in itself, you know the lives of D/HH people cannot be compromised any longer! There is absolutely no reason to hold up this bill. With your support on SB 444, we can get everyone to stand together, work together, and stop the harm! Let's get these kids Kindergarten-Ready! Thank you.