

My letter: February 17, 2016
Senators
Kansas State Capitol Room
300 SW 10th St.
Topeka, KS 66612
SUBJECT: VOTE YES TO SB 444

Dear Senator Jeff Melcher

As Kansas School for the Deaf alumni, former teacher, life-long deaf educator in the field of students to elders who are deaf/hard of hearing as teacher, role model and independent living skills coach. Not only those work-related experiences, I am deaf, born to hearing parents who were told to not learn sign language. So, I have had no language until the age of five when I was being enrolled to the school for the Deaf. From my daily experiences with other deaf children who were language deprived in their first three years, they are impacted in almost all academic areas. This had profoundly confirmed that the babies and toddlers must have access to the language from birth, and have the endless opportunities to acquire languages at very early age.

With my 30+ years of working with deaf children and adults, I find the statistics in the brochure valid and true. So many individuals cannot read/write well when they became adults and need the life-long support through their dependency on government benefits, independent living services, vocational rehabilitation services and mental health programs. I believe the reason for those deaf/hard of hearing young adults and middle-aged adults who did not have access to a language since their birth and on. They are deprived of such a basic **HUMAN RIGHT** of accessing and acquiring a language. I am writing to urge your support of SB 444: An Act Concerning Education; Creating A Language Assessment Program For Children Who Are Deaf and Hard of Hearing.

This SB 444 will ensure that Deaf and Hard of Hearing children in Kansas will be on track with their American Sign Language and English language development milestones and be Kindergarten-ready. Through the passage of this bill, Deaf and Hard of Hearing children will have access to developing a language through assessment and tracking from birth to 8 years. With the right support for early language acquisition and education in a language that is

accessible to them to become Kindergarten-ready, they will have academic achievement similar to children who can hear.

This bill **COSTS NOTHING** to the state and will actually save the state money in the years to come by decreasing the number of Deaf and Hard of Hearing adults who struggle with illiteracy, unemployment and dependency on government benefits.

Please vote YES on SB 444! Spokesperson for the bill is Chriz Dally. She can be reached at 925-270-1650.

Sincerely,
Earleene Hicks

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