

Testimony of
Suzanne Dennis
Commission Chair
Kansas Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

Before the
Senate Education Committee
February 18, 2016

My name is Suzanne Dennis, and I am the current chairperson for the Kansas Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (KCDHH).

I wanted to provide support for SB 444 on behalf of the Commission as we have been eagerly listening to the progress of this Language Equality and Acquisition for Deaf Kids (LEAD-K) development that the Kansas Association of the Deaf and its' committees have been working on for the past year or so. Currently, there are services that focus on the deaf and hard of hearing child, but do not begin early enough. The statistics and research do verify that deaf and hard of hearing children who lack the much needed language acquisition in the very early stages of development are more than likely NOT to be able to achieve language acquisition equal to their hearing peers later in life and will struggle with illiteracy, unemployment and dependency on government benefits.

The Commission comprises of 17 members who all have a vested interest in the mission of KCDHH which is advocating for and facilitating equal access to quality, coordinated and comprehensive services that enhance the life of Kansans who are deaf and hard of hearing. There are 5 Ex-Officio members who represent various departments within the state that have direct influence on deaf and hard of hearing consumers. Kansas Rehabilitation Services, Kansas School for the Deaf, Kansas Department of Education, Kansas Department of Health and Environment, and the Kansas Department of Children and Families. All of these Departments have services within that gear towards deaf and hard of hearing children and adults. Five (5) other members hold professional expertise within the scope of deaf and hard of hearing such as speech and language pathologists, audiologists, interpreting and social work, like myself. The remaining 7 commissioners are community members who are either deaf or hard of hearing, serving to provide their personal expertise, challenges, advocacy efforts, and the like. As you can see, this is a very elaborate and comprehensive group of individuals who are more than qualified to provide their expertise, resources, and support to this endeavor.

Respectfully yours,

Suzanne Dennis, Chair
Kansas Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing