

February 17, 2016

Re: Testimony in support of SB 444

To the Kansas State Legislature:

I have been working with the d/Deaf and hard-of-hearing (DHH) population for the past 21 years. I have worked with all ages, young children to senior citizens, during that time in several different capacities. I am a Kansas Certified American Sign Language/English(ASL/E) interpreter and have been the last 16 years. I have interpreted in medical situations, employment and workplace scenarios, workshops and public presentations, post-secondary classes including masters and doctoral level classes and in Video Relay Service (VRS) where I process and interpret phone calls between d/Deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals across the U.S. and U.S. territories. I actively volunteered and managed several years of summer camps for DHH youth in the state of Kansas. For the past seven years, I have worked in the state of Kansas as a certified teacher of the Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing, working with students ages pre-k thru high school. My background has allowed me the privilege and the opportunity to see the community from a broad perspective.

Over the course of my teaching career, I have continued to move towards working with younger and younger students. I am currently teaching a pre-k class for DHH students. I love my job and the children with whom I work. Seeing their excitement and progress is thrilling to me. However, I must admit, that I am frustrated and saddened on a daily basis. I have three-year-olds entering my class with NO LANGUAGE. Not a spoken language, not American Sign Language, nor a visual modality. **This is a travesty.** Anyone with a basic understanding of child development knows and recognizes the critical import of language acquisition and exposure required, particularly at the 0-3 age range, for social, communication and academic success. When a student enters pre-k essentially three years behind, it is nearly impossible for that child to ever “catch up”. It is a sad reality to be able to already predict a child’s life-long language and academic limitations by the time they are three, but that is the reality for a large percentage of these students. It is vital that DHH children have access to language from day one. Senate Bill 444 is absolutely necessary to create an assessment and tracking program that will help ensure that DHH children are developing and acquiring natural language at the rate of their hearing peers, and if they are not, that early interventions are set in place. Establishing an assessment and tracking system is imperative to ensure that the DHH community has equal access, equal opportunity and are equally productive citizens of our state.

I have heard the writers of the bill repeatedly declare “the heart of this bill is to ensure that deaf children have access to language in a parallel way that hearing children do, ensuring they are Kindergarten ready, enabling them to participate and progress through the American

education system on level with their hearing peers and then move on to be successful, productive and contributing members of society. It also creates a system that collects data that is presently not being collected which allows the state to look at areas of need and success.” Honestly, it is hard to imagine anyone opposing this idea. Despite some misunderstandings, this bill **does not** prescribe or mandate a specific language or communication modality. It is worded to accurately reflect the linguistic definitions of natural languages (i.e. English and American Sign Language) and other modes or systems currently used in communicating with deaf and hard of hearing children. This wording also allows the flexibility to not be limited to a list of modes dictated, but instead can also include potential tools and modes that might be created in the future. In extension, this bill **does not** replace or usurp the federal law IDEA, which requires that all mainstream, public education systems provide the full continuum of services to meet the needs of any child as prescribed in the IFSP or IEP. So, if a child who’s IEP mandates ASL services and language needs moves into a district that has not been providing those types of services to other students, under IDEA, the district is still required to provide those services. This is true now, before the passing of SB 444 and will still be true after SB 444 is passed into law.

In terms of the committee that SB 444 establishes, including an SLP role includes another service that many deaf and hard of hearing students receive and therefore should be included in the dialogue of developing and refining the assessment and data collection pieces written in the bill. However, one must examine closely the training of SLPs as well as the assessments that are frequently used by the profession. Rarely does an SLP training/degree program include any kind of classes for American Sign Language or other visual modalities. On the rare occasion that a program includes something like this in their training, it is typically one or two classes at most. Thusly, almost all SLPs graduating from college are not fluent in ASL or any other visual mode or supplement. Secondly, many of the common language assessments used by SLPs are strongly verbal based or verbal biased. Both of these factors can call into question the validity of the test results for deaf and hard of hearing students. While not all DHH students use ASL or other visual modalities, many do and we need to ensure that the tests are accessible and valid for these students and that the assessors have the necessary qualifications for valid results as well.

On a more personal note, I have two hearing children, ages 5 and 6, who have a profoundly deaf father. American Sign Language is used in my home as well as spoken English. When my daughter was about **19 months old, her vocabulary included 150 ASL signs and 10 English words**. As I mentioned before, I have 3 year olds entering my classroom with only the ability to grunt, point and cry. This cannot continue. These children need, deserve and are completely capable of developing language to be kindergarten-ready, just as their hearing peers are, we just need to do a better job of ensuring it happens.

Please, support our current and future DHH children who have so much to give to our community, they just need the access. Support Senate Bill 444.

Sincerely,

Kim Enos, MS Deaf Studies/Deaf Education, KQAS 4/4

Wichita, KS