

March 7, 2016

To: Dr. Steve Abrams, Chair
Senate Committee on Education

Fr: Robert A. Maile, Ph.D.
Deaf Educator/Retired KSSD Superintendent

Re: SB 444

I am writing in support of early, consistent language assessment for deaf children. For 47 years I taught and administered programs for deaf children both in residential settings and in public school day program settings. A clear observation in all settings is that the primary handicap of deaf children is not the inability to hear, but rather the resulting deficit in language development. Early fluent communication equates to normal educational and social/emotional development. The bill currently under consideration, if implemented, will go a long way toward unlocking the shackles which have constricted the educational progress of deaf children for generations.

Early identification of specific visual, written and oral language deficits will facilitate and enable early intervention and the development of fluent communication and age-appropriate language development. There are no downsides to this initiative. All deaf education programs and services, regardless of philosophy, strategies or approaches, will be better able to meet the needs of deaf children with consistent, reliable assessment information. It's a win, win, win proposition: concerned parents and educators will have the knowledge they need to proceed more quickly in a positive direction; the legislature and state education entities will be instrumental in removing a primary barrier and the true handicapping condition of deafness, language development and lack of early fluent communication; and of course, the children themselves will be the biggest benefactor, along with the communities which will benefit from their positive contributions.

Your positive consideration of SB 444 is greatly appreciated.