



Strong Families Make a Strong Kansas

Senate Committee on Education

February 18, 2016

Testimony on:

SB 444

Written Testimony by:

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Testimony of:

Michael Donnelly, Director of Rehabilitation Services
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Topeka, Kansas

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Chairman Abrams, Vice Chair Arpke, Ranking Member Hensley and Members of the Committee:

I am Michael Donnelly, Director of Rehabilitation Services for the Kansas Department for Children and Families (DCF). Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony regarding Senate Bill 444.

SB 444 would establish a language assessment program to be administered by the Kansas Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (KCDHH). The Rehabilitation Services division of DCF has administrative and budget oversight for KCDHH.

KCDHH is established in K.S.A 75-5391 and is overseen by a board of commissioners appointed by the Governor. KCDHH offers technical assistance, information/referral, sign language interpreter registration and coordination of interpreting services. As written, SB 444 appears to expand the role and authority of KCDHH to administer a program of assessment and to independently propose rules and regulations through an advisory committee to be established within KCDHH.

This proposed advisory committee would have 13 members, including the KCDHH Executive Director as an ex officio member. Funds are not currently budgeted to support the work of the advisory committee or to administer the program. The committee would be charged with developing specific action plans and proposed rules and regulations necessary to fully implement the program. The advisory committee would determine a standardized assessment to be used by local school districts and the early intervention services administered by Kansas Department of Health and Environment. The capacity of these entities to fund and carry out the assessments is currently unknown.

The proposed bill also provides a detailed list of actions to be undertaken by the committee and expected outcomes.

The concept of having a uniform system of assessments for children who are deaf or hard of hearing has merit when associated with early intervention activities as SB 444 envisions. According to research conducted by the Center for Childhood Deafness at the Boystown National Research Hospital in Omahaⁱ, “significantly better language scores were associated with early enrollment in intervention. High levels of family involvement correlated with positive language outcomes... The results suggest that success is achieved when early *identification* is paired with early interventions that

actively involve families.” As with all children, language and literacy development contribute to educational readiness and therefore to children realizing their full potential and self-reliance as adults.

DCF is neutral with regard to SB 444. DCF does support the general concept of this legislation with the above-mentioned concerns. Thank you for the opportunity to provide this written testimony.

ⁱ September 2000, Published by the U.S. National Library of Medicine in conjunction with the National Institute of Health