

March 8, 2016

SUBJECT: VOTE YES TO SB 444

Good Afternoon Committee Members;

As a Deaf Kansan with a Master's Degree in Adult Occupational and Continuing Education and with 20 years of experience working in the Vocational Rehabilitation and Mental Health Fields, I am expressing my support of SB 444.

What you have witnessed the last two days should speak volumes about the importance of this bill. You are being given a rare privilege of witnessing a historical moment. How often do you see a group of Deaf Kansans rallying together in front of Senators to urge for the passage of a bill? You are witnessing the heart of a self-empowerment movement, in which there are no paid lobbyists, all are volunteers passionate about stopping the epidemic of language deprivation.

Since no one in positions of authority in various departments took it upon themselves to address this unethical, harmful, decades-old epidemic of language deprivation, it took the Deaf community and its' allies to rally together in drafting SB 444 as a solution.

The state will save untold millions in the years to come simply by passing SB 444. Your vote to pass SB 444 will reduce the high numbers of illiteracy, unemployment and dependency on government benefits among Deaf and Hard of Hearing people. Most importantly, your vote to pass SB 444 will ensure there is accountability through data, to enable researchers and educators to document and statistically quantify effective approaches and apply the data to improving Kansas's early intervention and deaf education systems, which should have already been done years ago.

Do what is right, stop the harm, give back to the Deaf and Hard of Hearing infants and children their human birthright to access and acquire a language now. We do not have a valid excuse to hold this off for another year or decade. The time is now. Please pass SB 444.

Thank you,

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