

## LEAD-K Testimony - (Henry Lowe)

My name is Henry Lowe, and I am here as an employee and representative of The DEAF Community Advocacy Network (aka., DEAF C.A.N.!), a 501 C-3 which has served the Deaf, DB, and HOH communities of southeastern Michigan for almost 40 years. More importantly, I can only assume that my testimony before you today, in enthusiastic support for LEAD-K legislation, is a clear manifestation of destiny, especially as the proud son of Deaf parents; brother of a Deaf man; and, father to a Deaf daughter, all of which I am.

In my current capacity as a Program Director for the DCI-Detroit Public Schools Community District Professional Sign Language Interpreting Services Contract, I am responsible for the day-to-day operations of the provision of educational interpreting services for DPSCD's Deaf and Hard-of-hearing students; a position I have been blessed with for these past 8 years, after a 35 year career as a professional Sign Language Interpreter, most as an Educational Interpreter.

As a personal observation, I lament that the Language Equality and Acquisition for Deaf Kids legislative proposal is decades too late for my late parents and brother, who struggled—as have many profoundly Deaf and HOH individuals—to escape the bonds of mediocrity and 2<sup>nd</sup> class citizenship, due to their severely limited ability to communicate and function competitively in a principally English, auditory and oral society. After the death of my father when I was six months old, I grew up watching my barely literate Deaf mother, with four children and a 2<sup>nd</sup> grade education, eek out a hard-scrabbled, meager existence cleaning houses and coiffing hair on the weekends. My brother had to attend school hundreds of miles away from his family in Houston, at the State School for the Deaf in Austin, Texas. He didn't graduate high school, and throughout his adult life worked at menial jobs, and encountered discrimination, many disappointments and setbacks, primarily because of his lack of English literacy skills. Today, as I reflect on the privilege I now have to address my support for this greatly needed legislation before this body, I am left to wonder what accomplishments they, and many others like them, might have achieved had our society supported such a socially and educationally constructive Bill as LEAD-K, long ago.

Still, I am thrilled that today's Deaf community-- and its advocates-- have found a "voice" and are attempting to educate their hearing counterparts about the heartbreakingly negative effects of delayed language acquisition on the lives of Deaf children. The urgent need for this LEAD-K legislation in supporting young Deaf or hard of hearing children's acquisition of a strong language foundation for kindergarten readiness and academic success, is a long overdue philosophy, that enriches the educational and life experiences of a long-underserved people.

*Today's pandemic threatens more than just our collective health and mortality, as the new, largely untested, paradigm of virtual-only education will almost certainly require above average English language skills to promulgate success for all students. Delayed language due to a lack of a solid native language acquisition in Deaf and Hard of Hearing students poses a greater threat for failure, frustration and lack of success in educational, social and psychological*