

HB 5777

I am the father of an adult Deaf son. He attended the Total Communication Program for Deaf children in Dearborn. He thrived in that environment, went on to graduate from college and worked as a teacher and translator. He is now working on a graduate degree in linguistics.

I speak to you in support of House Bill 5777 because of what I observed during my son's time in Dearborn. During that time, every year, there would be children transferring into the program from the oral programs in Redford and Taylor. They were transferring in because it was obvious they were not learning anything useful. They were not able to communicate with either hearing or Deaf people. They had not learned any of the things we would expect them to know, especially if they were transferring in late grade school or later. Even the ones who transferred in early elementary school were already noticeably behind academically. They had undergone oral training, trying to learn to lipread and speak, at the expense of schoolwork and academics. I do not remember any of these kids having useable speech. The children had been given the so-called "right to fail" at oralism before being shuffled off to the signing program, where it was apparent that they would never catch up. The professionals knew the window for

language acquisition and cognitive skills necessary for academic success is very narrow. Even though they knew this, they refused to acknowledge the tremendous damage they were doing to these kids until it was way too late. It was a disaster and practically criminal. I suspect that if the parents of these children had not felt guilty for their acquiescence in going along with the oral program, there would have been lawsuits filed for the damage done.

My first sign language teacher, Judy, had gone to an oral school from the age of five until she graduated from high school. She had no useable speech, she could not even communicate well enough with her hairdresser to be able to explain what she wanted done and did not have any useable skills. This is the common lot of Deaf people who are kept from developing academically by an overemphasis on oral training. It leads to personal frustration and dependency on governmental social services.

It is natural and self-serving that the oral programs worked so hard to keep children from going to signing programs and learning to sign because they had a vested interest in keeping their student numbers up for funding purposes. I also think that when, finally, children who were not successful in the oral program were belatedly transferred into the signing program it was because the oral

programs didn't want these "failures" to bring down the test scores that are used to evaluate them. Those kids were sacrificed on the altar of oralism.

It is imperative that parents be given timely and honest information about their child's academic and social progress, so that they can make an informed choice about what is best for them. Just as most parents of hearing children are given information about the schools and programs they might have available to them, so should the parents of Deaf Children. They might decide to continue in the oral program, but it should be their decision, and based on all of the information available. The government should empower parents to make informed decision as to what is best for their child.

It is ethically right and good social policy to provide parents of Deaf children full and honest information on a regular and timely basis upon which then can determine what is best for their children.

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