



AMERICAN CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION

Michigan

## House Committee on Families, Children, and Seniors

### House Bill 5836

Position: Support

September 2, 2020

The American Civil Liberties Union of Michigan supports House Bill 5836. We view this as a key piece of legislation to stop what amounts to severe neglect of deaf children, leaving them with few options to become active members of our society and our democracy.

### Background

Because 96% of deaf children are born into hearing families,<sup>1</sup> their parents seldom understand how to help their child acquire language.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, far too many deaf children miss the critical window – in the years before kindergarten – to acquire language – *any* language, whether spoken English, sign language, or both. Without the resources and opportunities to get language, deaf children develop language deprivation syndrome – a phenomenon with detrimental, and long-lasting effects on the child’s mental and emotional development.<sup>3</sup>

Sanjay Gulati, of Harvard Medical School, believes “the single greatest risk faced by Deaf people is inadequate exposure to a usable first language.”<sup>4</sup> Currently, Deaf adults typically emerge from high school with a fourth-grade English-language reading level.<sup>5</sup> But many deaf people never graduate from high school, and are among those funneled into the school to prison pipeline. Reduced access to language and communication in the first years of life have life-long consequences.<sup>6</sup>

House Bill 5836 helps achieve the critical goal of aiding parents of deaf children in tracking their child’s language development from 0 – 5 years, so that if a child is not reaching developmental milestones, there can be medical and educational intervention.

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<sup>1</sup> Mitchell, R. E. (2005). How Many Deaf People Are There in the United States? Estimates From the Survey of Income and Program Participation. *J. Deaf Studies & Deaf Ed.*, 11(1), 112–19; Mitchell, R. & Karchmer, M. (2004). Chasing the Mythical Ten Percent: Parental Hearing Status of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students in the United States. *Sign Language Studies*, 4(2), 138-63.

<sup>2</sup> Humphries, T., et al. (2012). Language Acquisition for Deaf Children: Reducing the Harms of Zero Tolerance to the Use of Alternative Approaches. *Harm Reduction J.*, 9, 16.

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., Glickman, N. S., & Hall, W. C. (Eds.). (2018). *Language deprivation and deaf mental health*. New York, NY: Routledge.

<sup>4</sup> Gulati, S. (Apr. 2, 2014). Language Deprivation Syndrome. Presentation.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8yy\\_K6VrhJw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8yy_K6VrhJw).

<sup>5</sup> Traxler, C. (2000). The Stanford Achievement Test, 9th Edition: National norming and performance standards for deaf and hard-of-hearing students. *J. Deaf Studies & Deaf Ed.*, 5(4), 337.

<sup>6</sup> Hall, W. C., Levin, L. L., & Anderson, M. L. (2017). Language deprivation syndrome: A possible neurodevelopmental disorder with sociocultural origins. *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*, 52(6), 761–776.