

Written Testimony
Family Children Senior Committee
September 2, 2020

TO: Chair Crawford and Distinguished Members of the Family Children and Senior Committee

With this letter I am providing my support for this non-partisan LEAD-K HB-5836. When passed, this Bill will be the first step in Michigan's history in providing equitable language assessment to deaf and hard of hearing children along with allowing parents to have the appropriate resources, assessment data and ALL options available to them so they may become completely involved in the educational development of their child. What an amazing bill this would be. Every parent's wants their child to be kindergarten ready by the age of 5; this includes the human right of having age appropriate language skills.

As a teacher, principal and special education administrator in Michigan for 30 years, I can testify to what occurs when a deaf child comes to school with language deprivation. Too often psychological assessments may show that a deaf/HoH child has a cognitive disability when all too often it's "language deprivation". When a kindergartner arrives with a 5-year language delay, due to lack of language in the home, all too often you see an array of issues within the classroom which results in the psychological evaluation. Without language, behaviors manifest themselves and over the years we see young children grow into older children and young adults who display behavioral, social and/or emotional issues. A 5-year language delay often means a reading delay as well. If a "normal" hearing child was brought to our school having never been exposed to language (no ability to utter a word of language because the parent decided to deprive them of language) we would automatically notify CPS and consider this child abuse. Yet, we do this every day to deaf children and never give it a second thought? Think about it.

Not only am I an educator, I also have Deaf parents. My father was fortunate enough to be raised in New York City where he received an outstanding education at the Fanwood School for the Deaf. Unfortunately, my mother was raised in Michigan where her parents were told to "make her speak", for if she signed she would never learn how to speak. Well, my mother learned to "verbalize" and left school at the age of 16 with a 2nd grade reading level. The Michigan educational system FAILED her and continues to fail students today. Students are isolated in communities far and wide without assessments. Teachers do not have the assessments needed to assess LANGUAGE. Parents don't have the proper resources to know what their options are.

HB-5836 offers the resources the parents so desperately need and assessment the children can no longer go without. We can longer look back and change the past,

but we surely can move forward to a brighter horizon. Oppression and audism are etched in the hearts, souls and minds of many in the Deaf community. Let's make the transformation and replace the negativity with LEAD-K, HB 5836.

I am so thankful that Representative Crawford took on the huge task of drafting legislation pertaining to Deaf and Hard of Hearing children and language acquisition in Michigan; working diligently to make sure our children do not fail even before given a chance to begin.

When HB 5836 becomes law, parents will be empowered, children will become kindergarten ready and eventually we will have a future of STRONG DEAF, and HARD OF HEARING LEADERS in the State of Michigan.

Thank you for your support,

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