



## **HF 612 (2023-2024) Explainer**

### **Please Support the Right to Language Bill for Children**

[HF612](#) (Daniels) Children; definition of neglect modified.

#### **What does this bill do?**

This bill adds the failure to provide a child with access to language and the acquisition of language to the list of neglect as outlined in [Minnesota Statute 260E.03.15](#). This allows for resources such as teaching American Sign Language or assurance being in a language-rich environments as intervention opportunities. Note: We use the word “deaf” as an inclusive term for all deaf, hard-of-hearing, deafblind, deafdisabled, and late-deafened children.

#### **Why is the Right to Language for children needed?**

Although language deprivation is rare for children who can hear, language deprivation has long been prevalent among deaf children, and has life-long educational and economic consequences. Despite multiple efforts to address this through [Early Hearing Detection and Intervention](#) (EHDI) program, availability of early intervention programs, and [Help Me Grow](#) resources. Language deprivation continues to be prevalent among deaf children.

#### **Why is the Right to Language important?**

- Numerous research links language deprived deaf children at risk for cognitive delays, mental health difficulties, lower quality of life, a higher level of trauma, and limited literacy. All of which are fully preventable.
- World Federation of the Deaf [position paper](#) on access to national sign languages as a health need.
- National Association of the Deaf [position statement](#) on early cognitive and language development and education of deaf and hard of hearing children.
- Minnesota Department of Education Biennial Report to the Legislature [2020/2022](#) cited challenges of language acquisition often delayed or incomplete by age 5 with deaf, deafblind, and hard-of-hearing children.

#### **Who would be required to act addressing the Right to Language?**

Mandatory reporters will be required to report on concerns of access to language, language acquisition, and a language-rich environment. The local welfare agency is to develop a process to provide culturally appropriate screening, assessment(s), and if a case is opened: the family will be referred to available resources and ensure they follow through before the case is closed.

#### **Facts on Minnesota’s child protection system (CPS).**

The system responds to situations where children are alleged to be maltreated and helps support families to safely care for their children. Minnesota Department of Human Services works alongside Counties and Tribal Nations actively work to prevent child abuse and neglect. In response to meeting families’ cultural needs, there are Indian Child Welfare Act Unit and African American Child Well Being units. In 2020, local agencies screened 31,258 reports. More than 9 of every 10 were screened out because allegations did not meet the statutory threshold.

- MN DHS brochure: [Family Assessment response to child safety concerns](#)
- MN DHS brochure: [Family guide to child protection](#)
- Latest Minnesota’s Child Maltreatment Report, [2020](#)

## Addressing opponents' concerns

- Families may lose their deaf child to foster care.
  - The mission of CPS is to prevent, help, and support families and works to keep families together. Families with deaf children will not be separated. CPS undergoes this process for children that has been affected by extreme cases such as physical/sexual abuse, and unsecured drugs/weapons.
- All families with deaf children will be reported on and forced to learn American Sign Language.
  - Families with deaf children are permitted to raise their children however they like. This ensures that they will be supported in ensuring access to language is made for their child. Additionally, reports are only likely to be made if the deaf child is believed to be severely language delayed (lack of language-access, language acquisition, and language-rich environment).
- There have been past harmful actions by CPS with deaf individuals, this bill will exponentially increase harmful interactions.
  - DHS continually works to address this and to best meet families' cultural needs; their work also undergoes [Citizen Review Panels](#). They work collaboratively with other agencies to ensure proper interaction is happening.

## Editorial Review of '[Language Deprivation and Deaf Mental Health](#)'

"Language Deprivation is a worldwide occurrence with catastrophic consequence for Deaf people. Moreover, it is arguably the most controversial and misunderstood clinical syndrome that could be eradicated with better understanding of its origin and by creating smart public policy. *Language Deprivation and Deaf Mental Health* and its contributors raise numerous crucial issues to address this preventable syndrome and offer many innovative strategies to utilize in mental health, educational, and legal settings."

John Gournaris, PhD, director, Mental Health Program, Minnesota Department of Human Services, Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services Division

## Additional resources

- 2:02 video on '[What is Language Deprivation?](#)' by The Nyle DiMarco Foundation
- Roberta J. Cordano of Gallaudet University: [Why We Should Teach Everyone Sign Language From Birth](#)
- [Language First](#) aims to educate and raise awareness the importance of strong first language foundation.
- National Library of Medicine: Journal Submission: [The Right to Language](#)

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