

February 20, 2023

Chair Representative Dave Pinto
Vice Chair Representative Heather Keeler
Members of the Children and Families Finance and Policy Committee
Chief Author Representative Brian Daniels

RE: HF # 612

Thank you for this Bill HF #612

As a lifelong Deaf person, I am extremely excited about this bill because it outlined essential language additions (specifications) with clarifications that would secure paramount safeguards for Deaf children/learners in Minnesota.

I know first hand how important language acquisition is all about. I did not learn sign language until I was past 6 years old. Fortunately, my experience and interaction at my boarding school changed the trajectory of my life by leaps and bounds. However, definitely, it would have helped if I had been signing much earlier. I saw many peers struggle with language that they didn't have because of varied situations. Yet language deprivation is an issue that we must not ignore.

Language development is absolutely important...the sooner a deaf child acquires ASL, it becomes their ticket to the development of many cognitively related areas of skill(s). For example, In order to excel bilingually, the visual oriented Deaf student/person needs to have enhanced (ASL) communication background with tools so they could easily learn a second language.

As a father of CODA children, I assume you may have seen the CODA movie that won the Best Picture at the Oscars. The Deaf son in that movie is from Duluth Minnesota and he began signing at a very young age and that enabled him to comfortably choose career goals. Anyway, my hearing children learned ASL at a relatively young age and yet, they still became fluent with English. Language has a way building foundations - either way. Learning ASL did not deter them one bit about learning other language(s).

Hence it is important that this bill passes so we all can work together to drive limitless opportunities for Deaf children in Minnesota. It is inhuman to deprive visual ASL from this precarious population - Deaf children.

George M. Teegarden (1852-1936) a prominent educator and poet in Deaf America wrote this, "Nature hates force. Just as the flowing stream seeks the easiest path, so the mind seeks the way of least resistance. The sign-language offers to the deaf a broad and smooth avenue for the inflow and outflow of thought, and there is no other avenue for them like unto it."

Again, thank you!

Mike Cashman, MA, MEd

