



Washington State Association of the Deaf

PO Box 73471
Puyallup, WA 98373

October 3, 2016

Patty Murray, Ranking Member
Maria Cantwell, Committee Member
On Health, Education, Labor and Pensions

Dear Honorable US Senator,

It has come to our attention that S. 2424, a bill to reauthorize a program for early detection, diagnosis, and treatment regarding deaf and hard-of-hearing newborns, infants, and young children have been referred to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions. While we support the intent of the need to identify and screen for babies born Deaf, we have many concerns.

Early language acquisition should be the main focus of intervention services, as less than 15% of deaf and hard of hearing children are able to read and write proficiently. This is a fact. Hence, this reauthorization gives permission to an entity only focusing on the medical aspect of the problem that does not address this very core concern about language deprivation amongst deaf children in the USA.

We have many amendments we wish to see adopted. However, at this point in time, we will focus on the few areas that must be changed before this bill should become law. More specifically, we want to alert you to an inappropriate brand that you may not be aware of and used by only one organization.

The term "listening and spoken language" (LSL) is a brand name promulgated by an oppressive organization, Alexander Graham Bell Association, which has a history of causing serious epidemic of language deprivation by denying the Deaf babies access to most accessible languages, signed languages. This organization has also historically misguided parents with Deaf babies by taking them down to the path without signed languages. Their destructive propaganda needs to end.

You have the power to help the Deaf people end AGBell's oppressive and deliberate branding of lies that Deaf people no longer need signed languages.

This branding is problematic because it dismisses signed languages, guides the families down the path of serious language deprivation, and cruelly attacks the Deaf community who use American Sign Language.

If you keep the brand term "listening and spoken language," you are giving Alexander Graham Bell organization the power to overpower the needs of Deaf adults that have been struggling with language deprivation and consequently social-emotional issues. AGBell Association is the cause of the impoverished K-12 academic achievement. The most current data now shows that their approach is not working.

All children are born ready to learn; however, far too many deaf children are deprived of early language development and are not kindergarten ready. Research has shown that language deprivation or language delays between ages 0-5 is the main cause of many deaf children's eventual reading, academic, and social struggles. The type of language-rich environment and the quality of interaction to which children are exposed in the first five years of life greatly influence the outcomes of their adult lives.

Sincerely,

Washington State Association of the Deaf, Board of Directors:

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URGENT AMENDMENTS TO S. 2424

Replacing terminology with current terms and appropriate usage

AMEND Page 2, line 14

STRIKE-OUT: listening and spoken language and visual and signed language acquisition

REPLACE WITH: starting after “young children have been identified in a range of areas including”: language acquisition using both or one of the languages deaf and hard of hearing children use: American Sign Language and English.

AMEND Page 4, line 15 after “Information provided to parents must be accurate, comprehensive, and where appropriate, evidence-based, allowing families to make important decisions for their child in a timely way, including decisions related to... ”

STRIKE-OUT: the remainder of sentence thru to line 24 “including decisions relating to all possible assistive hearing technologies (such as hearing aids, cochlear implants, and Osseo integrated devices) and communication options (such as visual and sign language, listening and spoken language or both)”; and

REPLACE WITH: language acquisition for deaf and hard of hearing newborns, infants, toddlers, and young children. Expert support and resources should be provided to the families with the goal of becoming kindergarten-ready academically and socially. This includes information on brain development, American Sign Language, and English.

AMEND Page 9, line 14

INSERT: after “children’s language”: acquisition using American Sign Language and English

AMEND Page 11, line 18

INSERT: after “agencies;” regarding language acquisition services and programs for newborns, toddlers, and young children who use both or one of American Sign Language and English.

AMEND Page 12, line 11-12

STRIKE-OUT: “and communication options;”

REPLACE WITH: acquisition using both or one of the languages used by deaf and hard of hearing children: American Sign Language and English

AMEND Page 12, line 24

STRIKE OUT: “**treatment** and referral options” and

REPLACE WITH: language acquisition services and programs for newborns, infants, toddlers, and young children using both or one of American Sign Language and English.