



GOVERNOR'S COUNCIL ON DISABILITIES
& SPECIAL EDUCATION
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April 20, 2026

Honorable Members of the Alaska State Legislature
Alaska State Capitol
Juneau, AK 99801

RE: SUPPORT FOR HB 39 - EDUCATION FOR DEAF & HARD OF HEARING

Dear Members of the Alaska State Legislature,

On behalf of the Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education, we are writing to express strong support for House Bill (HB) 39. The Council thanks Representative Allard for her dedication to this important issue and for introducing this legislation during the 34th Alaska State Legislature.

The Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education (the Council / GCDSE) fulfills several federal and state roles, including serving as Alaska's State Council on Developmental Disabilities under the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act, the Interagency Coordinating Council (ICC) for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities, and the Special Education Advisory Panel (SESA) under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. In these roles, the Council works with Senior and Disabilities Services (SDS) and the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) to help ensure that children with disabilities and their families receive needed services and supports and have a voice in the planning and design of those services.

Given Alaska's rural nature, children who are Deaf or hard of hearing do not always have equitable access to language-rich educational opportunities, including access to American Sign Language (ASL). Some children may be placed in settings where spoken English is the only language consistently available, even when ASL may be critical to their language development. Without timely access to a fully accessible language, children may experience language delays that can affect educational, social, and long-term life outcomes.

Children who are Deaf or hard of hearing are born with the same capacity to acquire language, learn, and succeed as any other child. They deserve the same opportunity to develop strong language skills, graduate from high school, pursue higher education or training, and build meaningful careers.

All families of Deaf or hard of hearing children should have access to appropriate early intervention services, family education, accurate and comprehensive information, and state resources that help their children reach their full potential. This includes access to qualified professionals who are knowledgeable in supporting language acquisition throughout early childhood and the school years.

Children who are Deaf or hard of hearing should have opportunities to develop English and American Sign Language simultaneously when appropriate to their individual needs. Access to communication, specialized personnel, school programs, extracurricular activities, language peers, and Deaf adult role models can strengthen academic achievement, social development, emotional well-being, and self-confidence.

The Council strongly supports passage of HB 39 and its goal of improving educational opportunities and outcomes for Alaska students who are Deaf or hard of hearing.

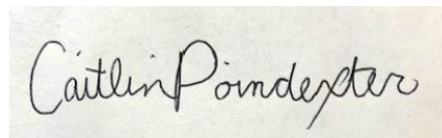
Sincerely,



Sabrina Richmond, GCSDE Chair



Patrick Reinhart
GCDSE Executive Director



Caitlin Poindexter
GCDSE Legislative Committee Co-Chair



Art Delaune
GCDSE Legislative Committee Co-Chair