



## **Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children's Bill of Rights Legislation, SB 08**

The Alaska Deaf Council (ADC) is Alaska's premier advocacy organization of, by, and for Deaf, DeafBlind, DeafDisabled, Hard of Hearing, and Late-Deafened individuals. We are a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization supported by the generosity of individual and organizational donors without political affiliation. The advocacy scope of the ADC focuses on early intervention, education, employment, health care, technology, telecommunications, youth leadership, civil and linguistic rights, and more with the intent to improve the lives of people in the state of Alaska.

It is imperative to recognize that Deaf children possess the same innate ability to acquire and develop language as any other child. Therefore, ensuring language acquisition should be treated with utmost priority. Deaf children are entitled to the right to be educated, to graduate from high school, to pursue further education, and to embark on a career path.

Deaf and Hard of Hearing children have the right to:

- Receive proper screenings and assessments of their hearing and vision capabilities conducted by qualified professionals who are proficient in American Sign Language (ASL), English, and knowledgeable about the educational needs of Deaf and Hard of Hearing children.
- Learn from educators who can communicate directly with Deaf children without the need for translators and who are skilled in fostering the child's language acquisition throughout early intervention and the school years.
- Have access to enough Deaf peers who are of the same language proficiency level and similar age.
- Engage with Deaf adult role models to internalize their self-worth and envisage their potential.
- Benefit entirely from all services and programs available at their schools to fully access education and integrate into society. This includes access to all information, specialized personnel, school programs, social activities, and extracurricular activities. It is essential to note that communication skills and/or modes alone do not equate to language proficiency.
- Be assessed in a timely and appropriate manner.





It is significant to note that eighteen states have enacted a Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children's Bill of Rights. Senator Elvi Gray Jackson introduced Senate Bill (08), "An Act relating to public school students who are deaf or hard of hearing". This bill requires each school district to provide parents of a child who is or is suspected of being deaf or hard of hearing with comprehensive, neutral, and unbiased information regarding:

- hearing technology, including hearing aids, bone-anchored hearing aids, cochlear implants,
- different methods of communication for a child who is deaf or hard of hearing, including listening and spoken language, a bilingual approach, cued speech, and total communication.
- services and programs that are designed to meet the needs of children who are deaf or hard of hearing.
- public and private entities knowledgeable about the needs of children who are deaf or hard of hearing,

This bill allows parents of children who are or are suspected to be deaf or hard of hearing to choose the method of communication they determine to be most appropriate and provide services in the chosen method. It will deliver services to a child who is suspected to be deaf or hard of hearing through professionals with training, experience, and a background in the chosen method of communication.

The executive board and members of the ADC support Senate Bill 08 and we recommend its passage this legislative session.

Respectfully,

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