

Michael Mason

From: Patty Trott <pmtrott@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, April 9, 2025 1:13 PM
To: Senate Education
Cc: Sen. Forrest Dunbar; Rep. Genevieve Mina
Subject: SB 8 Written Testimony

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony regarding SB 8.

My daughter, Iona, was born with a moderately severe sensorineural hearing loss (she begins to hear between 60-70 db). It is genetic and will never improve. She wears bilateral hearing aids. When her Father and I found out Iona had hearing loss, we chose to raise her in the hearing world. We immersed ourselves from birth to three in language acquisition. As an infant and toddler she wore her hearing aids every waking hour. At the age of three we toured the state school for the deaf and the LSL program as Iona qualified for either. We decided to enroll Iona in the Listening and Spoken Language program housed in Williwaw Elementary School.

This is a wonderfully successful preschool program for hard of hearing children. The goal of LSL is for the child to attend local schools in a mainstream hearing environment. This approach teaches young children with hearing loss to listen and talk with the support of hearing technology such as hearing aids, assistive listening devices (like a FM system) or cochlear implant. Parents that choose LSL also receive counseling and support for their child's speech and language production.

Iona entered kindergarten with an IEP to make sure the school addressed each of her speech/language and hearing needs. When she finished first grade, she tested herself out of an IEP and into a 504 educational plan! She was able to build on the skills and strategies taught in the LSL program so that she needed **less** support in the classroom. This is a win for us, Iona, the teacher, and ASD.

The Alaska Deaf Council wrote a position paper in support of this bill stating quote "this bill allows parents of children who are or suspected to be deaf or hard of hearing to choose the method of communication they determine to be the most appropriate and provide services in the chosen method." This bill does not address that many parents, myself included, chose or would choose the Listening and Spoken Language program, separate from the centralized program for deaf children. My concern with this legislation is that it does not state that the department shall establish and operate a separate centralized program for the hard of hearing, to be made available to hard of hearing students in the state.

You may ask, why is this important? Remember, the goal of the Listening and Spoken language program is for the student to attend local schools in a mainstream hearing environment. ASD has operated a LSL program for hard of hearing students at Williwaw Elementary (a mainstream hearing environment) for over a decade. Unfortunately, without adding language in SB 8 that protects the LSL only choice, ASD will move the LSL program to Russian Jack, the same location as the State School for the Deaf.

I understand you may be wondering, what is the big deal? So, a hard of hearing child gets to learn sign language and be around other kids that speak sign language. Well, first, language acquisition whether it be ASL, Russian, French or spoken English should be up to the parent. If parents don't

want their children to learn a language, that should be a choice. Second, (I just want to qualify that I'm not an expert, just a mom) but hearing language is crucial for language development because it allows children to learn and understand sounds, words, and the nuances of language which are essential for both receptive and expressive language skills as well as social interaction and communication. It is difficult and tiring for HoH kiddos to learn how to hear....their little brains work extra hard to listen and make connections that hearing children don't have to do. In the context of my own experience with raising a hard of hearing child; during her most important development years having my child be exposed to a language other than spoken English would have been counterproductive to her language development.

I understand, respect and would advocate for parents to have the right to choose a bilingual (sign language and spoken language) educational approach. Adding language to SB8 that states ASD will continue to have a separate school for hard of hearing children will ensure parents also have the choice to choose for the children to learn spoken language only.

Thank you,
Patty Trott

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