



THE STATE  
of ALASKA  
GOVERNOR MIKE DUNLEAVY

## Department of Health

SENIOR AND DISABILITY SERVICES  
Governor's Council on Disabilities  
and Special Education

550 W 7<sup>th</sup> Ave. Suite 1220  
Anchorage, Alaska 99501  
Main: 907.269.8990  
Toll Free: 1.888.269.8990  
Fax: 907.269.8995

April 25, 2025

Representative Jamie Allard  
State Capitol Building, Room 415  
Juneau, AK 99801

Re: HB 39 – An Act Relating to Public School Students Who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

Representative Allard,

The Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education (the Council) fills a variety of federal and state roles, including serving as the State Council on Developmental Disabilities (SCDD) under the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act, the Interagency Coordinating Council for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities (ICC), and the Special Education Advisory Panel (SEAP) under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. As the state DD Council, ICC, and SEAP, the Council works with Senior and Disabilities Services and the Department of Education and Early Development to ensure people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) and their families receive the services and supports that they need, as well as participate in the planning and design of those services.

Given Alaska's rural nature, children who are Deaf or hard of hearing are not always provided access to American Sign Language (ASL). Often children who are hard of hearing are placed together with hearing children and only given the opportunity to learn English, when ASL may provide them a better opportunity to acquire language. As they age, they often have a language deficit due to not being provided the proper opportunities as a child.

Deaf and hard of hearing children are born with the same ability to acquire language as any other children and deserve the same opportunities to do so. They have the capacity to be educated, graduate high school, obtain further education, and to pursue a career.

To that end, all families of Deaf or hard of hearing children should have access to appropriate early intervention and family educational services, comprehensive information, and access to state resources to help their deaf children reach their full potential. This includes access to, and assessment by, qualified professionals proficient in developing the child's acquisition of language throughout their early intervention and school years.

Deaf and hard of hearing children should be able to acquire both English and American Sign Language (a natural visual language) simultaneously with the support of intervention services prior to entering school and reinforced within the school system. Exposure to all information, specialized personnel, school programs, social activities, and extra-curricular activities will allow deaf and hard of hearing children to fully access their education and society. This exposure should be experienced in settings utilizing a critical mass of language peers to ensure age-appropriate development of learning, emotional and social skills, and should provide access to deaf adult role models to help internalize their self-worth and visualize their potential.

The Council strongly supports the passage of the House Bill 39, An Act Relating to Public School Students Who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing Children.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jena Crafton".

Jena Crafton  
Chair, GCDSE

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Caitlin Poindexter".

Caitlin Poindexter  
GCDSE Legislative Committee Chair

## Education for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Legislation



### ASK

Please support the passage of SB 8 and HB 39: Education for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

### WHAT

1. Deaf children are born with the same ability to acquire and develop language as any other children and have the right for this to be treated as a priority.
2. Deaf children have the right and the capacity to be educated, to graduate high school, to obtain further education, and to pursue a career.
3. Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children have the right to:
  - Receive appropriate screening and assessments of hearing and vision capabilities by qualified professionals proficient in ASL, English, and educational needs of deaf and hard of hearing children.
  - Learn from qualified professionals who can communicate directly with Deaf children – rather than through a translator – and who are proficient in developing the child's acquisition of language throughout the early intervention and school year.
  - Sufficient number of Deaf peers of same language mode level and age.

- Opportunities to interact with Deaf adult role models to internalize their self-worth and visualize their potential.
- Benefit from all services and programs at their schools to fully access education and society. This means every deaf child must have full access to all information, specialized personnel, school programs, social activities, and extra-curricular activities. Communication skills and/or modes by themselves do not equate language proficiency.
- To be assessed appropriately and timely.
- Eighteen states have passed a Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children's Bill of Rights.

### **ASK**

*Please support the passage SB 8 and HB 39: Education for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing*

**From:** [Kokoszka, Jamie J \(DOH\)](#)  
**To:** [House Education](#)  
**Cc:** [Reinhart, Patrick J \(DOH\)](#); [Burke, Chelsea K \(DOH\)](#); [Caitlin Poindexter](#); [Jena Crafton](#); [Saville, Richard L \(DOH\)](#); [Sabrina Richmond](#)  
**Subject:** GCDSE LOS for HB 39 EDUCATION FOR DEAF & HARD OF HEARING  
**Date:** Monday, April 28, 2025 9:33:53 AM  
**Attachments:** [image001.png](#)  
[Education for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing 2025 FINAL.pdf](#)  
[HB 39 Letter of Support - Education for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students.pdf](#)

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Regarding: HB 39 Hearing – GCDSE Public Testimony and Letter of Support

Dear Honorable Members of the House Education Committee,

To Representatives Himshoot and Story, Co-Chairs; Representatives Dibert, Eischeid, Underwood, Schwanke, and Elam:

The Alaska Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education (GCDSE) would like to express our gratitude to Representative Allard for bringing forth HB 39. We understand that a hearing for HB 39 is scheduled for April 30th at 8:00 AM before the House Education Committee, with both invited and public testimony. The Council's staff members, Rich Saville and Jamie Kokoszka, both Program Coordinator 2s, plan to provide public testimony during the hearing.

Attached is a Letter of Support as well as the Council's position paper that was presented during legislative visits in February. The Council is fully committed to assisting the Legislature in moving this bill forward. Should you have any questions or comments, please feel free to contact Executive Director Patrick Reinhart at [patrick.reinhart@alaska.gov](mailto:patrick.reinhart@alaska.gov) or by phone at 907-727-6610

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

**Jamie Kokoszka | Program Coordinator 2**

**Governor's Council on Disabilities & Special Education (GCDSE)**

550 W 7<sup>th</sup> Ave. Suite 1220

Anchorage, AK 99501

This is Dena'ina ełhena

Work Cell (direct line): 907-310-3699

GCDSE Main Office Phone: 907-269-8990

Toll Free: 1-888-269-8990

Fax: 907-269-8995

Email: [jamie.kokoszka@alaska.gov](mailto:jamie.kokoszka@alaska.gov)

Website: <https://health.alaska.gov/gcdse/pages/default.aspx>

Join us on Facebook! [www.facebook.com/GCDSE](http://www.facebook.com/GCDSE)



**From:** [Susan A](#)  
**To:** [House Education](#)  
**Subject:** Public Testimony on HB 39: Addressing the Needs of Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Children in Alaska - Grants Have Been Cut  
**Date:** Wednesday, April 30, 2025 9:08:26 AM

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## Public Testimony on HB 39: Addressing the Needs of Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Children in Alaska

Honorable Members of the Legislature,

I stand before you today to speak on a critical issue affecting some of the most vulnerable children in our state — those who are deaf or hard of hearing (D/HH). While HB 39 takes an important step in ensuring that school districts provide appropriate services for D/HH children, it is crucial that we also address the broader challenges these children face, particularly in light of recent federal budget cuts. These cuts have severely impacted the availability of essential services for D/HH children, making it even more urgent for this Legislature to take action.

### Impact of Federal Budget Cuts on Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Children

Recent cuts to federal funding, especially from the Department of Justice (DOJ) and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), have directly harmed D/HH children in Alaska. The following programs, which were essential to the education, healthcare, and overall well-being of these children, have seen significant reductions:

#### 1. DOJ Cuts:

- The DOJ's cuts to grants have eliminated funding for crucial support systems for D/HH individuals, including programs that provided legal assistance and access to interpreters in the criminal justice system. D/HH children, like their families, require access to these services to ensure that their rights are protected. These cuts have made it increasingly difficult for families to secure the legal protections and advocacy needed to ensure their children's rights in the educational and legal systems.

#### 2. HHS Cuts:

- The Early Hearing Detection and Intervention (EHDI) Program, which was a cornerstone of early childhood hearing screenings, has faced cuts that jeopardize the early identification of hearing impairments in infants. Early identification and intervention are vital to the development of language and communication skills. Without these screenings, children in Alaska may be denied timely access to essential services that are critical to their academic success.
- The Deaf Education Training Programs at institutions like Columbia University and the Rochester Institute of Technology, which trained educators to serve D/HH children, have been eliminated. This has led to a shortage of well-trained professionals who can effectively educate D/HH students. These programs helped ensure that educators had the skills necessary to meet the unique needs of D/HH children, and without them, educational opportunities for these students are severely limited.
- The Protection and Advocacy Programs administered by the Administration for Community

Living (ACL) have also seen cuts, reducing access to legal assistance for D/HH children. Families now face additional barriers in accessing the support they need to navigate the complexities of special education law and other services for their children.

## Broader Implications for Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Children in Alaska

The impact of these federal funding cuts is far-reaching, and D/HH children in Alaska are bearing the brunt of these reductions. The following issues highlight the challenges these children now face:

### 1. Delayed Identification and Intervention:

Without the EHDI program and early hearing screenings, many children may not be diagnosed with hearing impairments until later in life. Early identification is critical to providing these children with the necessary interventions to develop language skills. Delayed intervention often leads to struggles in academic achievement and social integration, creating long-term barriers to success.

### 2. Shortage of Trained Educators:

As mentioned earlier, the elimination of deaf education training programs has resulted in a shortage of qualified educators who can meet the unique needs of D/HH children. Without access to skilled professionals who are trained in various communication methods such as American Sign Language (ASL) or total communication, D/HH students are often left without the specialized services they need to succeed in school.

### 3. Legal and Advocacy Support:

The loss of funding for advocacy and legal services for D/HH children means that many families no longer have access to the resources that help them navigate special education laws and secure the services their children need. This leaves many D/HH children without the educational accommodations and protections they are entitled to under federal and state law.

## Recommendations for Legislative Action

Given these challenges, it is more important than ever that this Legislature take action to ensure that D/HH children in Alaska have access to the services and support they need to succeed. I recommend the following actions:

### 1. State-Level Funding for Deaf Education and Services:

We must allocate state resources to support programs for D/HH children, particularly in areas that have been impacted by federal cuts. This includes funding for early hearing screenings, special education services, and professional development for teachers and service providers.

### 2. Strengthening State Protections:

This Legislature must ensure that state policies protect the rights of D/HH children in the educational system, even in the absence of federal support. This includes reinforcing the right to a fully accessible education, as well as ensuring that D/HH children have access to the



necessary services, accommodations, and professionals to succeed.

### 3. Collaboration with Advocacy Organizations:

The state should partner with national and local organizations that advocate for D/HH children to create a network of support for affected families. These organizations are instrumental in providing legal, educational, and social services, and they can help ensure that D/HH children receive the resources they need, especially in light of federal cutbacks.

### 4. Increased Public Awareness:

Develop a public awareness campaign to inform parents of their rights and the resources available for D/HH children. This will help ensure that families are fully aware of the services they are entitled to, and it will empower them to advocate for their children.

### Conclusion

The federal cuts to DOJ and HHS programs have left a significant gap in services for D/HH children in Alaska. As a result, it is now up to our state government to step in and fill this void. HB 39 represents an important step in addressing the needs of D/HH children, but we must do more. By allocating state resources, strengthening protections, and ensuring access to qualified professionals, we can ensure that D/HH children in Alaska have the same opportunities to succeed as their hearing peers.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Susan Allmeroth

Two Rivers

### Amendment to HB 39: Addressing the Needs of Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Children in Alaska

Section 1. AS 14.30.272 is amended by adding new subsections:

(c) A school district shall, in collaboration with the department and to the maximum extent possible,

(1) provide a parent of a child who is deaf or hard of hearing, or who the school district suspects may be deaf or hard of hearing, with comprehensive, neutral, and unbiased information regarding:

(A) hearing technology, including hearing aids, bone-anchored hearing aids, cochlear implants, and remote microphone systems;

(B) 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;

(C) services and programs that are designed to meet the needs of children who are deaf or hard of hearing;

(D) support and advocacy services offered by public and private agencies and other entities knowledgeable about the needs of children who are deaf or hard of hearing;

(2) allow the parent of a child who is deaf or hard of hearing, or who the school district suspects may be deaf or hard of hearing, to choose the method of communication that the parent determines is most appropriate for the child and provide services using the parent's chosen method of communication for the child;

(3) deliver services to a child who is deaf or hard of hearing, or who the school district

suspects may be deaf or hard of hearing, through professionals with training, experience, and a background in the chosen method of communication.

(d) A school district shall inform a parent of a child who is deaf or hard of hearing, or who the school district suspects may be deaf or hard of hearing, of the school district's duties and of the parent's rights provided under (c) of this section.

(e) In response to the recent federal funding cuts, the department shall create a fund to ensure that services for children who are deaf or hard of hearing are not diminished due to changes in federal funding. This fund will prioritize resources to maintain early identification programs, specialized training for educators, and advocacy services for families.

(f) In this section:

(1) "bilingual approach" means the development of both sign language and English language literacy skills as a child's mode of receptive and expressive communication;

(2) "cued speech" means a visual communication system that uses hand shapes and placements in combination with the mouth movements of speech to identify the phonemes of spoken language that look similar to one another;

(3) "deaf" means possessing hearing levels that, with or without hearing technology, substantially affect a child's ability to understand spoken language;

(4) "hard of hearing" means possessing hearing levels that, with or without hearing technology, affect a child's ability to understand spoken language;

(5) "listening and spoken language" means communication that focuses on maximizing listening through the use of hearing technologies, professional intervention, and family involvement and support to facilitate the acquisition and development of the spoken language of the child's home and community;

(6) "total communication" means the combined use of signs, speech, speech-reading, auditory training, visual aids, manual gestures, and writing to convey information.

Section 2. AS 14.30.276 is amended by adding a new subsection to read:

(b) The department shall support one or more programs for the deaf to be made available to deaf students in the state. The program may provide residential services as part of its educational program in consultation and collaboration with a nongovernmental organization that provides services to people who are deaf and hard of hearing. If a school district operates a program, the school district shall annually submit a plan of operations to the department for approval and shall perform all duties of a local school district related to special education under state and federal law, except that the school district is only required to offer transportation to students who reside in the district. If a school district determines that placement in the program is appropriate for a child who resides in the district, the school district that makes the placement retains the school district's responsibilities for special education for that child under state and federal law.

(c) The department shall also establish a supplementary funding program for school districts to ensure continuity of services for D/HH children impacted by federal funding cuts. This program will ensure that school districts have access to the necessary resources to provide early identification services, specialized teacher training, and accessible learning environments for children who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Rationale for the Amendment:

- **Federal Funding Cuts:** The addition of Section (e) and Section (c) aims to address the gap created by federal funding cuts, particularly from DOJ and HHS. These cuts have reduced or

eliminated several key services that were vital to D/HH children, including early hearing detection, legal advocacy, and training for specialized educators.

- **State Support:** The creation of a state-level fund and supplementary funding program will ensure that D/HH children continue to receive the services and resources they need, regardless of the federal budget environment. These changes align with the intent of HB 39 to protect and improve the educational outcomes for deaf and hard-of-hearing children in Alaska.

This amendment ensures that the state steps in where federal cuts have left a void, allowing for the continuation of vital services for D/HH children. Feel free to suggest further revisions or updates to align with your goals.

Thank you for your time and consideration  
Susan Allmeroth  
Two Rivers

Here is a list of the key programs and services affected by federal funding cuts, specifically for Deaf and hard-of-hearing (D/HH) children:

#### 1. Early Hearing Detection and Intervention (EHDI) Programs

- **Impact:** The CDC's EHDI program, which provides hearing screenings for newborns, was eliminated.
- **Consequence:** Reduced early identification of hearing loss, jeopardizing timely intervention services for newborns, including D/HH children in Alaska.
- **Action Needed:** Advocate for state-level initiatives to maintain early screening programs.

#### 2. Deaf Education Training Programs

- **Impact:** Cuts to programs at universities like Columbia University and the Rochester Institute of Technology, which train educators to work with D/HH children.
- **Consequence:** Shortage of qualified teachers for D/HH children, especially in rural and underserved areas like Alaska.
- **Action Needed:** Support state-funded training programs for teachers and collaborate with universities to offer specialized training.

#### 3. Advocacy and Legal Services

- **Impact:** Elimination of grants for advocacy organizations that provided legal services and interpreter access for D/HH individuals, including children, in the criminal justice system.
- **Consequence:** Reduced access to legal support and interpreters for D/HH families, impairing their ability to navigate systems such as education and healthcare.
- **Action Needed:** Encourage state funding for local advocacy organizations and legal services

for D/HH individuals.

#### 4. Specialized Education and Residential Services

- Impact: Reduced funding for specialized schools and residential services for D/HH children.
- Consequence: Fewer educational opportunities tailored to the needs of D/HH students.
- Action Needed: Advocate for state investment in specialized educational programs, residential services, and collaborative efforts with nonprofit organizations.

#### 5. Communication Access Services (Interpreters, Captioning)

- Impact: Cuts to funding for services that provide sign language interpreters, captioning, and assistive listening devices.
- Consequence: D/HH children may lose access to crucial communication services that support their learning and social integration.
- Action Needed: Push for state-level funding to ensure that schools and other institutions can offer these essential services.

#### 6. Support for Families and Community Advocacy

- Impact: Reduction in funding for family-centered services and community organizations that support D/HH children.
- Consequence: Families may face greater challenges in navigating the needs of their D/HH children without proper support and guidance.
- Action Needed: Advocate for local and state funding for community-based programs that provide resources and advocacy for families with D/HH children.

#### Recommendations for Action:

- State Funding and Resource Allocation: Encourage the state to allocate resources to replace or supplement the cuts to federal programs.
- State Advocacy: Engage with federal lawmakers to restore funding to key programs that support D/HH children and their families.
- Partnership with Nonprofits: Collaborate with local nonprofit organizations that specialize in serving the D/HH community to maintain services.
- Teacher and Service Provider Training: Support the development of state-level programs to train teachers and service providers in working with D/HH children.

Here is a list of the key programs and services affected by federal funding cuts, specifically for Deaf and hard-of-hearing (D/HH) children:

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- Consequence: Reduced early identification of hearing loss, jeopardizing timely intervention services for newborns, including D/HH children in Alaska.
- Action Needed: Advocate for state-level initiatives to maintain early screening programs.

## 2. Deaf Education Training Programs

- Impact: Cuts to programs at universities like Columbia University and the Rochester Institute of Technology, which train educators to work with D/HH children.
- Consequence: Shortage of qualified teachers for D/HH children, especially in rural and underserved areas like Alaska.
- Action Needed: Support state-funded training programs for teachers and collaborate with universities to offer specialized training.

## 3. Advocacy and Legal Services

- Impact: Elimination of grants for advocacy organizations that provided legal services and interpreter access for D/HH individuals, including children, in the criminal justice system.
- Consequence: Reduced access to legal support and interpreters for D/HH families, impairing their ability to navigate systems such as education and healthcare.
- Action Needed: Encourage state funding for local advocacy organizations and legal services for D/HH individuals.

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- **Consequence:** Families may face greater challenges in navigating the needs of their D/HH children without proper support and guidance.
- **Action Needed:** Advocate for local and state funding for community-based programs that provide resources and advocacy for families with D/HH children.

### Recommendations for Action:

- **State Funding and Resource Allocation:** Encourage the state to allocate resources to replace or supplement the cuts to federal programs.
- **State Advocacy:** Engage with federal lawmakers to restore funding to key programs that support D/HH children and their families.
- **Partnership with Nonprofits:** Collaborate with local nonprofit organizations that specialize in serving the D/HH community to maintain services.
- **Teacher and Service Provider Training:** Support the development of state-level programs to train teachers and service providers in working with D/HH children.

Here's the expanded public testimony, incorporating the full list of cuts and their impact on deaf and hard-of-hearing children, seniors, and services:

### Public Testimony on HB 39: "An Act Relating to Public School Students Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing"

Honorable Chair and Members of the Committee,

I come before you today to express my strong support for HB 39, which aims to ensure that students who are deaf or hard of hearing receive the education and resources they need to thrive. However, while this bill takes a step in the right direction, I must urge you to consider broader issues that are currently impacting both our children and seniors who are deaf or hard of hearing, particularly as related to federal funding cuts that have had a devastating effect on services and supports they rely on.

### Challenges Faced by Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Children

First, let me emphasize the importance of providing comprehensive, unbiased, and neutral information to parents of children who are deaf or hard of hearing, as outlined in HB 39. This provision is critical, and I fully support it. However, the need for such information is exacerbated by cuts to federal programs that support deaf education and services. Here are some key examples:

- **National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders (NIDCD) Cuts:** Funding for NIDCD has been reduced by \$3.3 million for competing research projects and \$2.8 million for research centers, limiting critical research into hearing technologies and communication methods for D/HH children.
- **Teacher Education Programs:** With the elimination of funding for teacher quality partnerships and the Hawkins Centers of Excellence, we risk a shortage of qualified teachers who are trained to work with D/HH students.
- **Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) Restructuring:** The proposed restructuring under Project 2025 could disrupt coordination between OSERS and other essential services for D/HH students, leading to gaps in the delivery of special education services.
- **Specialized Institutions and Residential Services:** Institutions like the National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID) could face financial hardships due to proposed budget cuts that threaten specialized educational programming for D/HH students across the nation.

### Impact on Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Seniors

In addition to these cuts affecting children, our senior citizens who are deaf or hard of hearing are also being adversely impacted. The elimination of critical services for seniors with hearing loss puts this vulnerable group at risk, as many depend on federally funded programs for their health, safety, and well-being:

- **Administration for Community Living (ACL):** The elimination of the ACL will significantly disrupt services provided to D/HH seniors, including social services, transportation, and meal programs like Meals on Wheels. The loss of these services places many seniors in the position of isolation and unmet basic needs.
- **Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP):** The proposed cuts to LIHEAP could force many D/HH seniors to make difficult choices between staying warm and meeting other critical needs, especially in cold states like Alaska.
- **Medicaid Cuts:** D/HH seniors often rely on Medicaid for access to healthcare services and technology such as hearing aids and speech therapy. The proposed cuts to Medicaid are likely to leave many without vital services, affecting their quality of life and independence.
- **Meals on Wheels:** The proposed reduction in funding for Meals on Wheels threatens food security for D/HH seniors who rely on the program for daily meals and social interaction.
- **Senior Community Services Employment Program (SCSEP):** D/HH seniors seeking employment opportunities may face greater challenges with the elimination of SCSEP, which supports low-income older workers with job training and placement services.
- **Direct Care Workforce Strategies Center:** This vital program provides training for workers who assist seniors with disabilities. The cuts to this center will further exacerbate the shortage of qualified caregivers for D/HH seniors.

### Federal Funding Cuts Affecting All Deaf Individuals

Additionally, several broad federal programs will have a devastating impact on the entire D/HH community:

- Social Services Block Grant (SSBG): With cuts to SSBG, critical services for individuals with disabilities—including D/HH individuals—may be reduced or eliminated, further isolating vulnerable members of our community.
- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP): Many D/HH individuals, including seniors, rely on SNAP for food assistance. Proposed cuts to this program threaten food security for many families in our community.
- Federal Work Study and Need-Based Financial Aid: D/HH students depend on financial aid to access higher education. Cuts to federal work-study programs and need-based aid would limit opportunities for these students to pursue and complete their education.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, while HB 39 is a much-needed step in the right direction, it must be understood in the broader context of the ongoing federal cuts to essential services for both children and seniors who are deaf or hard of hearing. These cuts threaten to further isolate and marginalize a community that already faces significant barriers in education, healthcare, and basic services.

I urge this committee to not only pass HB 39 but also advocate for additional support for D/HH children and seniors, particularly in the face of these federal budget cuts. We must ensure that the rights of our deaf and hard-of-hearing residents are respected, that they have access to the resources they need, and that their voices are heard.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Susan Allmeroth

Two Rivers



**From:** [Irene Quednow](#)  
**To:** [House Education](#)  
**Subject:** Support for HB 39  
**Date:** Tuesday, April 29, 2025 11:36:14 AM

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Dear Representatives,

I am in support of HB 39. We are giving special help to so many different kind of students who need it, it seems it is high time to do the same for students that are hard of hearing or deaf. Please vote in favor of this bill.

Irene Quednow