



Alaska State Legislature
Representative Jamie D. Allard
Alaska State Capitol, Room 415
Juneau, AK 99801-1182
907-465-2995

House Bill 111

Sponsor Statement

House Bill 111 is a deaf and hard of hearing children's bill of rights that would establish the least restrictive environment for those children as an environment where American Sign Language is the primary language, allows parents to choose the best method of communication for their child and requires the school district to provide services using the parent's chosen method of communication.

First, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) grants all children the right to receive their education in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). For a student who is deaf or has hearing impairments, the LRE may be one with other students and instructors whose primary language is also American Sign Language.

Secondly, deaf children are born with the same ability to acquire language as others. They have the right and capacity to be educated, graduate from high school, obtain further education, and pursue a career. They have the right to have their ability to communicate and acquire language to be treated as a priority.

Lack of access in the classroom leads to students missing essential information in lectures and classroom discussions and can lead to low academic achievement and lower language acquisition. Children who are deaf or hard of hearing have the right to accommodations and access to academic instruction, school services, and extracurricular activities in their primary language. Access in their primary languages gives them the opportunity to benefit from all services and programs at their schools and to fully access education and society.

Given the unique nature of rural Alaska, some children who are deaf or hard of hearing may require residential services as part of their educational program. HB 111 declares all deaf children have the right to an individualized education program and that their parent will be able to choose the method of communication that will be the most appropriate for the child.

HB111 establishes that children who are deaf or hard of hearing have the right to an individualized education program that identifies their primary language, considers their prognosis for hearing loss, provides instruction in their primary language and LRE, provides assistive devices and services, and provides appropriate and timely assessments in their primary language.

Seventeen states have passed a Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children's Bill of Rights.