

April 7, 2016
TESTIMONY TO THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

Thursday, April 7 at 2:01 p.m.
Conference Room 308, State Capitol

Dear Chairs Luke and Nishimoto:

As a resident of Hawai'i, I, Carie Sarver of Kaimuki urge you to lend support to SB2476 and vote for it.

SB2476 enforces language benchmarks in American Sign Language and English during each Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Deaf-Blind (DHHDB) child's first five years to ensure they are on track to be academically and socially ready for Kindergarten.

I support this bill because I have seen the effects of language delays and deprivation on DHHDB children and I want all kids in our state to start Kindergarten on even ground.

In my 18 years as a Sign Language interpreter I've worked with the DHHDB community in settings such as medical, legal, business, social, and educational. I've seen students from Pre-K through high school in two states in mainstream and residential programs enter the classroom unable to share their own names, the names of their families or caretakers and unable to express their wants and needs.

This delay in language acquisition follows them through their school years and into adult life as I've seen in doctor's offices, social security lines, social services meetings, and so on. I've seen DHHDB consumers struggle to read their mail, communicate with close family members, even to make a simple medical appointment. Currently, in Hawaii only 14% of DHHDB students read proficiently compared to 74% of their non-deaf peers. It is time to close that gap. It's time to provide our DHHDB children with the tools they need to prepare for their academic years and give them a fair shot at life.

As an ally to the DHHDB community and as an interpreter I want to see more of our adult citizens in board rooms, college classrooms, and professional settings than in court rooms, unemployment lines or other social services offices. I am hopeful that the work that SB2476 will do on behalf our children will help to lead them there.

Sincerely,

Carie Sarver



DISABILITY AND COMMUNICATION ACCESS BOARD

919 Ala Moana Boulevard, Room 101 • Honolulu, Hawaii 96814
Ph. (808) 586-8121 (V/TDD) • Fax (808) 586-8129

April 7, 2016

TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

Senate Bill 2476, SD2, HD1 – Relating to Health

The Disability and Communication Access Board (DCAB) supports Senate Bill 2476, SD2, HD1 - Relating to Health. This bill enhances early language services for children who are deaf, hard of hearing, or deaf-blind; establishes a working group for the purposes of investigating issues related to resources and tools for parents of children who are deaf, hard of hearing, or deaf-blind and improvements to the statewide system of services that support age-appropriate language development for children from birth to age five who are deaf, hard of hearing, or deaf-blind. Requires the working group to report to the legislature; and appropriates funds for two positions to support the early language services within the Department of Health.

House Draft 1 was a collaborative effort from a group of representatives from the Departments of Health and Education, along with DCAB, meeting twice with community advocates to discuss and develop HD1, and is a good starting point to establish early language acquisition services within the Department of Health and to begin the development of resources and tools needed to implement a sound program for language acquisition for children who are deaf, hard of hearing, or deaf-blind. The working group can begin that effort, as well as investigate and recommend any additional legislation needed to sustain efforts to have deaf, hard of hearing and deaf-blind children language-ready by the time they begin kindergarten.

We strongly believe that the majority of representatives of the working group be deaf, hard of hearing, or deaf-blind regardless of the type of communication mode they choose to use. Planning for a specific population's needs must include members of the target group in order to achieve the best results. DCAB is willing to participate as a member of the working group, and is honored to have a role in the development of this important effort to ensure equal access to language for all children.

DCAB defers to the Department of Health regarding the number of positions and appropriation necessary to establish language acquisition services for children who are deaf, hard of hearing, and deaf-blind.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Respectfully submitted,

BARBARA FISCHLOWITZ-LEONG
Chairperson
Legislative Committee

FRANCINE WAI
Executive Director