



April 8, 2022

The Honorable Patrick O'Donnell
Chair, Assembly Committee on Education
PO Box 942849
Sacramento, CA 95814-4900

RE: Funding for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children Services; AB 2541

Dear Chair O'Donnell:

On behalf of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA), I write to recommend that AB 2541 be amended to direct funding for services to children from birth to five years of age who are deaf and hard of hearing (D/HH) to the Department of Education, and that funding be apportioned to school districts for determining the best services and supports for those children.

ASHA is the national professional, scientific, and credentialing association for 223,000 members and affiliates who are audiologists; speech-language pathologists; speech, language, and hearing scientists; audiology and speech-language pathology support personnel; and students. Over 15,000 ASHA members reside in California.¹

ASHA supports additional funding for services to children with disabilities including those who are D/HH. ASHA understands that recent recommendations (Section 56477 of Senate Bill 75) for improving services to children with disabilities did not include recommendations for children who are D/HH.² While ASHA agrees with the critical need for supporting students who are D/HH, ASHA does not support requiring school districts to contract exclusively with the California School for the Deaf to provide those services. Parents of children who are D/HH require multiple options for services and supports. The California School for the Deaf is certainly one such option, but other programs that support, for example, listening and spoken language must be equally supported and made available to families. Service and supports must be determined by the Individualized Education Program Team or Individualized Family Service Plan, which includes audiologists and speech-language pathologists, other professionals, and most importantly parents who understand the needs of their child and family.

Assembly Bill 2541 also restricts funding to American Sign Language (ASL) or English speakers. The bill defines English to include spoken English, written English, or English with the use of visual supplements. ASHA supports the term spoken or oral language so that non-native English speakers who are D/HH will be eligible for this additional funding.

Young children who are D/HH may receive services through California's early intervention program, which includes a variety of communication methods that suit the individual child's needs and the family's preferences. Those methods may include ASL, but they may also include listening and spoken language (with assistance from a hearing aid or cochlear implant), cued speech or language, or another communication method with appropriate educational supports. Families whose children are D/HH may continue to need services in school depending on their child's individual needs

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Having communication options to choose from is critical for parents. Over 90% of children who are deaf are born to parents who can hear.³ While ASL may be the most appropriate choice for some children, **ASHA recognizes that there are several evidence-based communication options that should be made available to families.**

Thank you for your consideration of ASHA's recommendations to AB 2541. If you or your staff have any questions, please contact Eileen Crowe, ASHA's director, state association relations, at ecrowe@asha.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Judy Rich". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Judy Rich, EdD, CCC-SLP, BCS-CL
2022 ASHA President

¹ American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (2021). *California* [Quick Facts]. <https://www.asha.org/siteassets/uploadedfiles/California-State-Flyer.pdf>.

² California Department of Education. (2019). *Senate Bill 75, Legislative Report* <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/se/ac/sb75legreportfinal.asp>.

³ Mitchell, R., Karchmer, M. (2002). *Chasing the Mythical Text Percent: Parental Hearing Status of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students in the United States*. Gallaudet Research Institute. https://research.gallaudet.edu/Demographics/SLS_Paper.pdf.