

Oral testimony of Sara Hale before the House Committee of Health and Human Services on Bill SB 343 - Updating the term “Hearing Impaired” to Hard of Hearing in statues related to persons with hearing loss.

March 7, 2022

Thank you Chairperson Representative Landwehr and the committee for your time today to consider our testimonies on this bill. My name is Sara Hale. I am here to represent We the Deaf People (WTDP) organization. WTDP is planned as a humanitarian organization, a watchdog, and a Deaf-rights advocacy group focusing on educating the public about various Deaf and Hard of Hearing issues. I have been Deaf since birth and raised by parents who are Deaf themselves. Because of that I have been fully immersed in the Deaf Culture since infancy and graduated from a school for the Deaf in Minnesota. I attended Gallaudet University, the only Liberal Arts college for the Deaf in the world. My husband is also Deaf and we have four kids; two are hearing and two are Deaf. Sharing Deaf Culture with my Deaf sons is important to me and I hope they never experience the negative label of the term “Hearing Impaired”.

SB 343 will update all statues from Deaf and “Hearing Impaired” to Deaf and Hard of Hearing. The phrase “Hearing Impaired” is viewed as a negative term to most Deaf and Hard of Hearing people. The term focuses on what we can’t do. It establishes the standard as “hearing” and anything different as “impaired” or substandard and/or damaged. It implies that something is broken and needs to be fixed. Changing the phrase from “Hearing Impaired” to Deaf and Hard of Hearing brings a more positive view and incorporates our values, cultures, and social relationships.

Historically, Deaf and Hard of Hearing people were forced to use oralism and prevented from using sign language in order to fit into the “norm”. They were also forcibly sterilized and not allowed to marry in attempts to eliminate Deaf people. Hearing people also believed that the Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals would not be able to learn anything and they did not provide them with an education. Thankfully now times are changing and American Sign Language and Deaf Culture is accepted.

Hearing people have always “invented” terminology used to label us. Some examples that have been used in the past is “Deaf-Mute”, “Deaf-Dumb”, and “Hearing Impaired”. We have never had a say in what we preferred to be called and that is “Deaf and Hard of Hearing”.

Thank you for your time. Your support of Bill SB 343 will help make the necessary changes to a more positive term that is accepted in the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community.