

Hi,

My name is Rebecca Lalanne and I'm the Director for DVAS (Deaf Vermonters Advocacy Services). We are a culturally and linguistically designed advocacy organization to meet specific needs of Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and DeafBlind (DHHDB) community members from youth to elders. We also provide training on awareness, culture, and access for a variety of public service entities, including but not limited to: the police academy, court systems, hospitals, and schools.

H.871 bill could help create DHHDB programs and spaces. As there is no longer a Deaf school in Vermont, this bill would indeed benefit the community and support the accommodations our population needs, seeks, and has a right to.

For example: Austine, my old Deaf school where I proudly attended since I was three till I graduated in 1997, closed and is currently repurposed and used by a daycare, offices, shelters, and many more. This bill could create DHHDB-specific housing and/or community programming on campuses such as this, as we do not have any in our state, despite a significant need for them.

This line in particular stands out (PAGE 10, LINES 11-20, Population Considerations): *“any other population the working group deems relevant to its work and recommendations.”* The first thought my mind went to is the DHHDB students! There are current educational buildings that are not appropriately designed to this population's needs. We have unique (visual/kinesthetic) accommodations due to culture and language that need to be integrated into renovations, re-builds, and new builds of schools.

I strongly recommended that the Working Group consult with those entities needed to ensure accessibility compliance/enhancement for structures & programs: AHS/DAIL; State Director of DHHDB Services (currently Laura Siegel); Others with working knowledge of/lived experience with ADA & visual systems for alerts.

I appreciate your time, openness, and willingness to see this perspective. I am happy to have further conversations - Please reach out to me anytime.