

Testimony before Senate Government Operations

February 25, 2015

My Name is Ralph Gallo and I am here today in support of the Senate Bill S.66, introduced by Senators Pollina, Balint, Cummings, McCormack, and White concerning the establishment of a bill of rights for children who are deaf or hard of hearing and to create a Commission for Persons Who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing.

I am a lifelong resident of Hartford Vermont. I am Bi-lingual ASL/English. I am a proud Alumni of Austine School. The Austine School for the Deaf has been an important program for Deaf Vermonters and their families. Austine School was established in 1904, to date the school has just over a 1,000 graduates. Austine Graduates have attended Gallaudet University, Rochester Institute of Technology, University of Vermont, University of Massachusetts, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, UCLA, and many more programs.

Holton Hall is the oldest building on the Austine Campus built in 1912, named after Senator Dr. Henry Dwight Holton. Last week DAIL, Commissioner Wehry, mentioned that HOPEFULLY the status of the Austine Museum, which is in Holton Hall, a collection of Austine History, will be preserved. She also mentioned that this will be determined by the trustee who is overseeing the liquidation process. In 2004, the State of Vermont and Austine agreed to the long range Capital venture¹ to restore HOLTON HALL, which was over \$3 million dollars.² You have a vested interest in our history too. Our Alumni Association is currently trying to work with the Vermont Historic Society to out Holton Hall on the Historic Register.

Did you know that the restoration of Holton Hall was done in such a manner to allow the rooms to help reduce the acoustics so that people could use auxiliary aids and technology that would allow them to communicate better. Furthermore the renovations of this building were done to allow for natural lights and comfortable lighting that would provide better facial receptive skills. Those are important architectural designs that are needed for communication to occur.

¹ http://bgs.vermont.gov/leg_reports/report1_2008

² http://www.reformer.com/localnews/ci_22166193

Senator Dr. Henry Dwight Holton knew the important of providing support services for children with disabilities. You are sitting in the same seats he was. Let us respect and show that history on the campus of Austine School.

Our unexpected journey here to Montpelier to discuss the quality of Deaf Education and Services for the Deaf Community in Vermont was not something we thought we had to do , but the bankruptcy of Austine School, Vermont Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing has force us to call out and address the issues at stake here. By the way bankruptcies have been resolved by Government interaction; look at the City of Detroit, it went through restructuring. Our presence here is to discuss the restructuring of Austine School and Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing for Vermont.

I would like to discuss a sensitive topic, bullying. We know bullying that any child can be a victim of bullying, but I want to point out that there is evidence that deaf children are more vulnerable to bullying than others. We must bring back Austine School, there is so much research that suggested this. Last week the numbers presented by the Agency of Education shows that we have Deaf and Hard of Hearing students. We need to provide them with an opportunity to be Bi-lingual, and not limit the options to them. Please read Positioned as Bystanders: Deaf Students' Experiences and Perceptions of Informal Learning Phenomena by Mindy Hopper. This will give you a better understanding of why we should have a centralized school for deaf and hard of hearing children in Vermont.

Thank you for listening to me and we urge you to pass Senate Bill 66 to create the Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing and restore services to Vermont that was equal or better to what was at the Vermont Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. In 2012, Governor Shumlin said “We must keep Austine Strong”.³

³ http://www.reformer.com/localnews/ci_22166193