

Testimony on S. 66, An act pertaining to individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing

Thank you for the opportunity to testify about this very important issue on behalf of the Agency of Education. I'm Karin Edwards, the Director of the Pre-K through Middle School division. Cindy Moran, the State Director of Special Education, is an assistant director in my division. We were both very much involved in transitioning the services to the Vermont students who had worked with consultants from the Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing and saw it as a priority of the Agency that this be done in as smooth and speedy manner as possible. I'm going to present information about children and youth ages 3-22 who have moved from the wonderful services Linda described and have entered the public education system. I'll also share information about how the transition of services was accomplished and current work of state agencies and the new Vermont Deaf and Hard of Hearing Program.

Numbers

- Currently 531 children and youth ages 3-22 are identified as deaf or hard of hearing
- 282 are eligible for special education
 - 78 of those eligible for special education have deaf or hard of hearing as a primary disability
- In Vermont 13,930 children and youth ages 3-22 are eligible for special education
- 197 children and youth who are deaf and hard of hearing have 504 plans and receive accommodations, supports and services as required by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act
- An additional 52 students have some other type of plan such as an Education Support Team plan
 - 2 of these students have deafness as a primary disability
- Based on 2014 child count data there are 6 Vermont students and 1 adult without a diploma are attending an out of state school for the deaf and hard of hearing (grade range from 5th to 9th)
- At the time it closed 4 Vermont students attended the Austine School, 1 of them had deafness as a primary disability

Transition of Services

- On **September 15, 2014** AOE received notification from a staff member at VCHH that the Center was closing
- Several of us with assistance from Deputy Secretary Fischer, and in discussion with Linda Hazard from VDH, considered several options for a new home for the services
- Immediate concern was continuity of services
- Nine East was chosen because it had the necessary statewide infrastructure, a director who was a former assistant director for special education at the then Department of Education. She has worked for the benefit of students with disabilities for most of her career, has created and run stable and successful organizations serving students with disabilities throughout the state, and most

- importantly to us Nine East and the director were experienced with working with the educational community in Vermont
- Services for students resumed on **October 20, 2014**
 - 12 of the 13 consultants who had worked at VCHH moved to Nine East
 - AOE receives quarterly written updates on work done

Beyond Continuity of Services

Agencies

- On-going interagency discussion and collaboration about how we can best serve this group of individuals and how we can address identified needs such as a single point of contact
- Focus on how Agencies can work together to ensure smooth transitions from early to school age services and from high school to adult life

Vermont Deaf and Hard of Hearing Program

- Susan Kimmerly and Linda Hazzard have collaborated closely to review and begin revisions to services
 - Organizational structure
 - Staff support and supervision
 - Training and education for staff across various options and communication modes for the deaf and hard of hearing
- Database is being developed that will have longitudinal capabilities so student outcomes can be tracked
- Work has begun to identify and respond to needs within the system that supports children and youth who are deaf or hard of hearing
- Webinars for in place service providers who work with children and youth who are deaf or hard of hearing and their families are planned to begin this spring
- Website is being designed that will be tailored to various audiences (potential to become single point of contact)