



**AMERICAN
SCHOOL FOR
THE
DEAF**

ALL ways able.

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Appropriations Committee Hearing on Education

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Testimony by Jeffrey S. Bravin, Executive Director

American School for the Deaf

Good evening. I am here tonight to with an urgent plea to request the Appropriations Committee put ASD on the path towards restoration of our full appropriation of \$10,264,242 and to shield us from harmful holdbacks. ASD's state funding has been significantly impacted by line item reductions and holdbacks since 2012.

Last year, we were thankful for an an increase of \$500,000 to our Appropriation, bringing us to \$8,357,514; however, last June we were notified that \$425,000 was going to be held back by the Office of Police and Management. Over time, these funding decreases have substantially contributed to a \$2.9 million deficit in our Core Pre-K through 12th grade academic program.

ASD's Core program welcomes students from across Connecticut and is the only educational option available for deaf and hard of hearing students in our State. We offer barrier-free access to education through a fully language and communication accessible environment, and our staff hold specialized credentials and qualifications to meet the diverse learning needs and styles of our students. The social-emotional support students receive at ASD is also unparalleled, since they are part of a community of peers and do not feel any stigma associated with their hearing loss. We are, in effect, the Least Restrictive Environment for deaf and hard of hearing students.

Though ASD has creatively restructured and reprioritized our initiatives, our deficit has grown to a degree that even our most stringent cost-saving measures can bear. To continue operating our Core program, we closed several critical programs, reduced our staff by 20% and even appropriated revenue away from other internal programs to subsidize its operation. Our available options have diminished and the situation is now untenable.

COVID-19 has only heightened an already perilous situation. As many schools in Connecticut and across our country, ASD is working tirelessly to manage the ongoing public health crisis while remaining fully operational to support the learning, social-emotional and nutritional needs of our students. Last March, our academic program followed State directives by transitioning to a remote learning model – not an easy feat for visual learners with unique communication needs. Although our academic program transitioned to a remote learning model, our

PACES Residential Treatment Program – which serves deaf and hard of hearing students with significant behavioral and emotional challenges – remained open and operational (24/7) throughout the pandemic.

This past September, however, ASD made the decision to transition back from a remote learning model to open our doors for full in-person learning – a decision that carried exceptional operational costs to ensure the health, safety and well-being of our students and staff. These excess costs, totaling almost \$1 million, have heightened ASD's budget crisis. Although we were fortunate to receive funding through the Payroll Protection Program, these funds have added to our debt since there is no guarantee that they will be forgivable. Additionally, ASD did not qualify for CARES or HEROES Act funding, since we are an educational organization.

Due to our continued budget shortfall, ASD has made the difficult decision to raise tuition for our Core program. Though we do not ever want to lose students because of increased costs, we understand that this tuition increase is necessary to continue funding our essential Core program. An increase to our Appropriation would provide ASD with greater flexibility to balance reasonable tuition costs with the need to manage expenses.

These are challenging times, and we must all work together to support Connecticut's deaf and hard of hearing students. I sincerely hope you will join me in advocating for the full reinstatement of ASD's Appropriation. Thank you.