

March 9, 2021

Dear Appropriations Committee,

Thank you for allowing me the honor and opportunity to provide remarks. Let me tell you a bit about myself. My name is Dr. Julie Tibbitt. I am the principal at American School for the Deaf. I earned my doctorate in Critical Studies in the Education of Deaf Learners and I am also currently working as a Visiting Assistant Professor at Saint Joseph's University.

As the principal at ASD, I support a team of highly qualified professionals in deaf education. All of us use sign language in the workplace. That is because we wholeheartedly believe in visual access for our deaf learners, so that they can learn through something that comes naturally to all of us - our eyesight. We also work with many DeafBlind students. We even have staff who is DeafBlind. And of course, I am deaf myself. Even though I surprised my parents with my Deaf identity, they knew enough to let me believe that the world was my oyster - and for that I remain forever incredibly thankful.

Language comes before thought. Most of our deaf learners arrive with little language, and they exit at graduation with the means to fluidly communicate their thoughts, feelings and desires. That is because we gift them the language of learning through fully visual means (American Sign Language). Talk to any of our alumni or parents- they will tell you how glad they are that ASD happened in their life. We truly do make a difference for many.

Why should we be concerned about funding a school with so few students, when deafness is such a low-incidence population? That's a great question and one that has been asked countless times in the past. It is because all of us can and do still contribute to society. All of us eventually become mechanics, counselors, delivery drivers, accountants and superintendents.

American School for the Deaf is exceptional in the sense that we offer a team approach for all kinds of solutions. You do not see this in the public schools. Each child at ASD is equipped with a customized team, one that works tirelessly to support their individual and unique needs. One recent example that I personally know of is when one of our DeafBlind Teacher Aides traveled to the home of a DeafBlind student to set up technology for access during this pandemic learning. That same DeafBlind employee helps direct traffic on our campus each day too. He inspires me, and inspires our students. That is why our students deserve to attend a school where they can look up to role models and know that they are just as capable.

Your funds go a long way in ensuring staff availability and resources. It really does! We are able to allocate time and resources well on our end, but we continue to face challenges year after year when we are not able to keep up with the greatly evolving trends. One example is, the Chromebooks that we dispatch to all of our students; our teachers also need similar technology for themselves. Another example is being able to configure our buildings with special equipment such as adaptive bikes that enhances access for our students with additional needs.

There is truly no place like ASD - and I want us to go on forever if we can! Thank you for taking the time to listen today.