



Representing thousands of children with hearing loss who have learned to listen and speak, and the parents who chose that communication method for them, we share our strong opposition to SB 354.

WHAT IS SB 354?

Texas Senate Bill 354 was filed in December 2016 by Senator Kirk Watson. The bill mandates that all children with a hearing loss of 20db or higher (in one or both ears) will be subject to quarterly assessments in both ASL and English until they reach 8 years of age. The advisory committee reviewing the assessments has the power and duty to "establish and modify the child's education plan." You can review the complete bill on our website at www.centerhearingandspeech.org.

The bill was crafted and sponsored by LEAD-K, a group leading a "visual rights campaign" with the goal of incorporating American Sign Language (ASL) into all Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH) children's communication modes. You can learn more about LEAD-K by visiting their website www.leadk.org.

The Center for Hearing and Speech agrees with LEAD-K that every single child with a hearing loss deserves a method of communication as quickly as possible.

We are confident that the powerful combination of early identification, unbiased options counseling and informed parent choice will accomplish this goal.

We do not believe that learning to listen and speak is the only communication option for children with hearing loss. Because every child's loss is unique, one size does not fit all. We respect the Deaf Community's desire to preserve its identity, and support families who choose the ASL option for their children. However, we do not believe a single community should have the power to determine what communication option is best for every child. That right belongs to the parent.

SB 354: EXCLUSION OF PARENTAL CHOICE

Our primary concern is that SB 354 overrides parent choice. The bill mandates quarterly testing for children birth to 8 years. Testing must be performed in both American Sign Language (ASL) and English. Alarmingly, the bill's language is ambiguous concerning who will serve as assessors, and those assessors have an overreaching power and duty to "establish and modify educational plans."

ADDITIONAL CONCERNS OF SB 354

Aside from our primary concern of governmental overreach, we have additional reasons to oppose the bill:

- The bill is too general in nature and does not provide consideration for specific populations (i.e., families who speak any other language besides English, children with mild hearing loss, children with progressive hearing loss, children with multiple disabilities).
- SB 354 creates an appointed super committee of mostly deaf adults, all of whom must be fluent in ASL, who will be responsible for the broad duties outlined in the bill. The super committee does not include fair and equitable representation of highly qualified, normal-hearing professionals. A requirement for fluency in ASL skews and biases the committee.
 - **Parents: This means that the committee will be able to establish or modify your child's educational plan without your input.**
- We are deeply concerned that the biased super committee will be responsible for developing and choosing assessments, then making educational recommendations to the "Center" (Texas State School for Deaf). These assessments have not yet been developed, and because the bill's language is vague, the assessments may very well not reflect a fair and impartial balance of communication options and appropriate benchmarks.
 - **Parents: These may not include oral speech assessments.**

JOIN US!

The Center for Hearing and Speech, along with Sunshine Cottage, Hearing School of the Southwest, physicians, industry professionals, parents and Board members, are working diligently to defeat SB 354.

We need your help! Are you a CHS parent or client? Are you a professional or community member who agrees that SB 354 is not the answer to improving outcomes for deaf and hard of hearing children? If so, we would love to hear from you! We have strategies in place and are looking for advocates to join our cause.

Please fill out a short interest form at the following link and one of our staff will be in touch soon:

<http://www.centerhearingandspeech.org/forms/share-your-story/>.