

Testimony of:

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Kansas Department for Children and Families

Testimony on:

Senate Bill 343 – Referring Deaf and Hard of Hearing
January 27, 2022

Chair Hilderbrand and Members of Senate Committee on Public Health and Welfare:

My name is Robert Cooper and I am the Executive Director of the Kansas Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (KCDHH). KCDHH is a state agency housed administratively within the Department for Children and Families (DCF) and based in Topeka. KCDHH works with agencies and organizations throughout Kansas to assure availability and coordination of services for people who are deaf and hard of hearing, including communication access and resources related to hearing loss.

KCDHH is governed by a 17-member Commission, of which there are five ex-officio members representing key state agencies and twelve at-large members appointed by the Governor. The positions taken and expressed by the Commission do not necessarily represent the views or positions of DCF.

KCDHH was first established in 1982 as the Kansas Commission for the Deaf and Hearing Impaired (KCDHI). In 1992, at the request of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Community, the State Legislature changed the name to KCDHH. Unfortunately, the change in 1992 was not comprehensive enough to include necessary changes to other existing statutes that reference “hearing impaired,” as the preference is to be called either hard of hearing or individuals with hearing loss, if they are not being identified as Deaf.

KCDHH has always put an emphasis on how public officials are in a unique position to convey positive images of people with disabilities, including the individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing. As a general rule, it is proper when referring to a person with a disability or disabilities by putting the person first and then using a positive reference such as “a person with a hearing loss.” Individual(s) may prefer you to refer to them as deaf or hard of hearing. This consideration was cited in 2017 KCDHH’s publication, *Quick Guide for Kansas Public Employees on Accommodating Deaf and Hard of Hearing* and it also mirrors another resource, *Guidelines: How to Write and Report About People with Disabilities, Research and Training Center on Independent Living, University of Kansas, 8th Edition (2013)*. Both resources also ask everyone not to refer to anyone as a “hearing-impaired person.”

The effort behind this proposed SB 343 was presented to KCDHH earlier last year and was shared at the KCDHH Commission meeting on January 14, 2022, in which the KCDHH Commission has given its full support of this effort to finish the necessary changes to existing statutes by removing any improper references. The Commission does not feel there are changes needed other than what is currently written in the proposed SB 343 at the present time. However, following the meeting on January 14, KCDHH has since recognized an opportunity for an additional amendment as proposed by the Kansas Speech-Language-Hearing Association (KSHA) in regard to speech and language disorders that also exist among current statutes with terminologies SB 343 aims to change. They also noted on page 17, line 26, a reference to KCDHI had not been changed, which needs to be. KCDHH is in full concurrence with these new additions.

KCDHH thanks you for your consideration and support of this SB 343.