

Date: May 23, 2025

To: K-12 Education Workgroup for Special Session

Chair Mary Kunesch

Sen. Steve Cwodzinski

Sen. Heather Gustafson

Sen. Erin Maye Quade

Sen. Jason Rarick

Chair Cheryl Youakim

Chair Ron Kresha

Rep. Ben Bakeberg

Rep. Sydney Jordan

Rep. Mary Frances Clardy

Rep. Patricia Mueller

From: Minnesota Commission of the Deaf, DeafBlind & Hard of Hearing

Support full access to language for babies and their families

The Commission thanks the Senate Education Finance committee leadership for including in the SF2255 2nd engrossment (lines 108.25-108.30) a small but critical investment towards preventing cognitive harm in deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing babies. This \$150,000-per-year appropriation for the Metro Deaf School Birth-3 Early Learning Program will equip families to ensure their child's brain has the language it requires for healthy development. Promoting healthy cognitive development, in turn, potentially reduces the need for future costly special education interventions.

The Commission considers the lack of a fully accessible language during a deaf, deafblind, or hard of hearing child's critical early development years to be a **public health crisis**. This crisis, while only recently starting to be documented in research, has already resulted in decades of costly cognitive harm to children that could have otherwise been prevented.

The Commission urges the House workgroup members to also support those provisions, both for improved educational outcomes and for prudent long-term use of special education dollars. The MDS Birth-Three program is the sole center-based program available to families in the metro area who wish to immerse their deaf, deafblind, or hard of hearing babies in American Sign Language. Please see the attached explainer for more information on this program and the families it serves.

Signed,



Alicia Lane, Government Relations Director