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### **Testimony in support of SF3698**

Senate Education Policy Hearing  
Chair: Senator Steve A. Cwodzinski

Wednesday, March 13, 2024, 12:30 pm  
Location: MSB 1200

March 12, 2024

Dear Chair Cwodzinski and Committee Members,

We are writing in regards to SF3698. We are deeply appreciative of your work to improve the teaching and learning of reading for the students of Minnesota, however, we have concerns for Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing students (DHH). We write this as private citizens who work as researchers, faculty and supervisors training DHH teachers at the University of Minnesota. The READ Act is an excellent support for children and we support this bill with expanded definitions to be inclusive for all children, including Deaf and Hard of Hearing children. There is increasing evidence that children can learn to read without sound-based approaches and SF3698 should take this into consideration (e.g., Scott, 2022). As written, the READ Act is not inclusive of the needs of DHH students using American Sign Language (ASL) as one of the languages of instruction.

### **While we are supportive of and believe in the value of the updated READ Act (SF3698), we are proposing the bill be amended for three main reasons:**

1. It is not appropriate for the context and developmental stage of all readers such as deaf and hard of hearing readers.
  - It assumes all readers have access to sound-based approaches to reading (i.e., phonics)
  - It does not take into consideration recent research demonstrating children (including deaf, hard of hearing and hearing children) can learn to read without access to or through sound-based approaches (e.g. Scott 2022; Moses et al, 2015; Mayberry et al., 2011)
  - It does not take into consideration the role of fingerspelling as a pathway to decoding (Stone et al., 2015)
2. Definitions for key words need to be expanded to support reading development for all children.
  - Expanding the term phonics/phonological awareness
  - Add and expand on the term decoding instruction to include fingerspelling.
  - Expand on the term oral language to include expressive/receptive languages.
  - Add and expand on the term multilingual to include American Sign Language (Kurz et al., 2021).
3. It doesn't expand on who the instructional support staff could be. We recommend expanding to include:
  - ASL specialist
  - Reading specialist fluent in ASL
  - Reading specialist trained in multilingual strategies (including with ASL)

We know that reading is at the core of teaching and learning. We are supportive of teaching reading and are willing to work collaboratively to improve reading instruction in the state for all children.

Sincerely,

Debbie Golos, PhD, Hugo, MN  
Brynn Kraning, PhD, Saint Louis, MO