



## DIVISION ON DEAF, DEAFBLIND AND HARD OF HEARING

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**DATE:** May 3, 2016

**TO:** Senate Health Policy Committee

**FROM:** Annie Urasky  
Director, Division on Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing  
Michigan Department of Civil Rights

**SUBJECT:** House Bills 5182-5188 and Senate Bills 690-694

Chairperson Shirkey, Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of these bills today. My name is Annie Urasky and I am the Director of the Division on Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing, housed within the Michigan Department of Civil Rights.

Before you today is a twelve bill package that seeks to correct the outdated, and in some instances even offensive, language used in Michigan laws that impact the lives of Michigan residents and visitors who are d/Deaf, d/DeafBlind or hard of hearing. The bills come from a group of Michigan legislators on the bipartisan Michigan Legislative Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing Caucus established in 2015, devoted solely to examining the issues of these Michiganders. I would be remiss if I did not thank them for their efforts.

Caucus members have met with many different and diverse groups, often representing individuals with different concerns and priorities. They have discovered that the concerns of persons who are d/Deaf, d/DeafBlind, and hard of hearing differ from each other in unique ways, just as within any other group whose individual members have differing opinions and views. The Caucus is working on some very difficult and even contentious issues like mental health and education, on which the only point of complete agreement may be that something needs to be done. Those efforts are ongoing and we look forward to continuing to work with them in search of common ground, sound policy, and good legislation.

However, the Caucus has found areas where there is no disagreement, including in particular, about the language used in Michigan laws. I am referring to language that may have been appropriate, or at least acceptable, at the time the laws were initially drafted and adopted, but which is at best outdated today.

Issues like deaf education and the mental health needs of Michiganders who are d/Deaf, d/DeafBlind, or hard of hearing, are enormously important. They are so important that they should be analyzed and addressed independently as the Caucus is currently doing. The bills before you are not substantive changes in law, they are important changes in language. These twelve bills will not 'fix' the big issues and problems faced by those who are d/Deaf, d/DeafBlind, or hard of hearing – but they will at least show that Michigan law respects them. These bills certainly will not get us where we want to be legislatively, but they are an important first step. The Michigan Department of Civil Rights, Division on Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing urges you to take this step.