April 15, 2022

The Honorable Patrick O'Donnell
Chair, Assembly Committee on Education
PO Box 942849
Sacramento, CA 95814-4900

RE: Funding for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children Services; AB 2541

Dear Chair O'Donnell:

On behalf of the American Cochlear Implant Alliance, I write to ask the Committee to amend AB 2541 to better serve children who are deaf or hard of hearing. ACI Alliance is a non-profit organization of parents of children with hearing loss, adults with hearing loss, cochlear implant clinicians, and educators of children who are deaf and hard of hearing. We fully support providing additional funds to support the necessary language and educational needs of children who are deaf or hard of hearing, especially those from birth until age 5.

We understand that recent recommendations (Section 56477 of Senate Bill 75) for improving services to children with disabilities did not include recommendations for children who are deaf and hard of hearing (D/HH). We agree with many other hearing health organizations that there is a critical need to support these children with well-funded services. However, AB 2541 as written, would require school districts to contract exclusively with the California School for the Deaf to provide those services. Parents of children who are D/HH must be provided with multiple options for services and supports. The California School for the Deaf is an option for those families that chose American Sign Language (ASL) for their child, but other programs that support families who chose other strong programs should be funded as well. This includes programs and schools that support listening and spoken language (LSL), the language of the home, and other services and supports determined by the Individualized Education Program Team or Individualized Family Service Plan. These plans are developed inclusively with medical and educational professionals and the families who understand the needs of their child and family. AB 2541 should be amended to expand the scope of services and options for all California families. This is consistent with the Federal intent of IDEA which uses family choice as a cornerstone of Federal educational law.
Assembly Bill 2541 also restricts funding to American Sign Language (ASL) or English speakers. This would exclude non-native English speakers who are D/HH from receiving any additional support or funding.

We ask the Committee to amend AB 2541 to direct funding for services to children from birth to five years of age who are deaf and hard of hearing (D/HH) to the Department of Education, and that funding be apportioned to school districts for determining the best services and supports for all children of California—not just those whose families chose one language modality.

American Cochlear Implant Alliance is available to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Donna Sorkin
Executive Director
American Cochlear Implant Alliance