



Senate Bill 254
Proponent Testimony
Senate Government Oversight & Reform Committee
March 4, 2026

Chair Manchester, Vice Chair Brenner, Ranking Member Weinstein, and members of the Senate Government Oversight & Reform Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Senate Bill 254, which would formally recognize April as Ohio Deaf History Month. My name is Julie Hazelbaker, and I write today on behalf of the Ohio Speech and Hearing Governmental Affairs Coalition (OSHGAC).

By way of background, OSHGAC is made up of representatives from the Ohio Academy of Audiology, the Ohio Council of Speech and Hearing Administrators, the Ohio School Speech-Pathology and Educational Audiology Coalition, and the Ohio Speech-Language and Hearing Association. Together, we represent the interests of more than 9,400 speech-language pathologists and 1,200 audiologists across the state of Ohio.

SB 254 represents an important step toward aligning Ohio with national observance practices and honoring the contributions of Deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals throughout our state.

Deaf awareness initiatives in many parts of the country already span the entire month of April, and Ohio should be consistent in recognizing this important observance. Establishing a full month creates meaningful space to celebrate the history, culture, and accomplishments of Deaf and hard-of-hearing Ohioans, who enrich our communities in countless ways.

Deaf education also deserves broader public understanding and support. Ensuring that Deaf children have access to language-rich learning environments is essential for their academic, occupational, and social development. Ohio has a particularly strong legacy in this area, as the Ohio School for the Deaf has been educating students for nearly 200 years, serving as a cornerstone institution for generations of Ohio families.

Aligning Ohio's observance with National Deaf History Month will promote greater awareness of the Deaf community's achievements and help foster improved communication between individuals who use spoken language and those who use American Sign Language or other

manual languages. Increasing visibility and understanding is a vital step toward reducing communication barriers and strengthening inclusivity across our state.

On behalf of OSHGAC, I respectfully urge you to support SB 254 and affirm Ohio's commitment to recognizing and uplifting Deaf and hard-of-hearing residents.

Thank you for your time and your service to our state.

Sincerely,

Julie Hazelbaker, Ph.D.
Member, Ohio Speech and Hearing Governmental Affairs Coalition