

Testimony of the Ohio Deaf History Month, March 13-April 15
In Support of the Ohio Senate Bill 27
Before Health, Human Services and Medicaid Committee
February 28, 2017

Chairman Burke, Vice-Chair Beagle, and Members of the Health, Human Services and Medicaid Committee, thank you for giving me the opportunity to provide testimony on the Ohio Senate Bill 27 today.

My name is Irene Tunanidas and I am a state-certified teacher of Deaf Students in the state of Ohio and Member-at-Large with Citizens of Deaf Cultures team that helped draft the Ohio Senate Bill 27. I began my teaching career with the Youngstown Public Schools in 1972 after receiving my first Master's degree in Deaf Education from Kent State University. After 40 years in the teaching profession with the Ohio Public Schools, I retired in 2013.

I grew up in a hearing home and my hearing loss at the age of three was caused by double dosage of antibiotics. My education began in the Oral Program and I was mainstreamed at the now-defunct Woodrow Wilson Junior and Senior High School in Youngstown, Ohio until my graduation in 1966.

During my early schooling days, I spent quality time at a public library in my neighborhood. I was encouraged by my parents to explore my world by reading books about people and animals. However, at that time, no books about deaf pioneers were on the shelves at the public library. In the Oral Deaf Program where I participated until the 7th Grade, my teachers never mentioned how Oral Education evolved, and whether there were deaf mentors that would motivate deaf students to make useful goals in the future.

During my undergraduate days at Gallaudet, I learned more about the History of Deaf Education when I volunteered my time working at BUFF AND BLUE, a college newspaper for Gallaudet students. My job was to arrange newspaper issues according to volume numbers on the shelves. I learned more about Gallaudet's history when I was involved in a student protest to oust campus physician whose medical specialization was in obstetrics, and was deemed unqualified to examine students' ailments.

My knowledge of the Deaf World expanded when I began graduate studies in Deaf Education at Kent State University. Kent State University's library stored volumes of books relevant to deafness, American Sign Language and Deaf Culture. One of the books at Kent State University Library featured stories on Alexander Graham Bell's historic feud with Edward Miner Gallaudet, the son of the first deaf school founder, and founder of Gallaudet University that bears his family name. What intrigued me was that Alexander Graham Bell, the telephone pioneer, had a deaf mother and deaf wife. Bell, a staunch supporter of the Oral Philosophy, broke his friendship with Dr. Edward Miner Gallaudet because Gallaudet tried to make the new college in Washington, D.C. an institution of higher education for deaf students that Bell vehemently opposed. Dr. Edward Miner Gallaudet and his father, Reverend Thomas Gallaudet, Episcopalian minister, and founder of the first school for the deaf in Connecticut had deaf wives.

During my teaching days at Woodrow Wilson High School in Youngstown, Ohio, I proposed an implementation of Deaf History as part of the Deaf Program curriculum. This was an eye-opening experience for deaf students who asked if they were allowed to make choices in life. They were unaware that deaf pioneers made their mark in the mainstream community such as education and technology. Deaf History was dropped from my program after one year because my department's supervisor did not feel that high school deaf students were mature enough to form opinions on issues and make informed choices on courses selected to benefit their education.

Recently, I visited several public libraries in my community, and I find more American Sign Language books for interested persons wishing to learn to communicate with the Deaf but no books by deaf authors or researchers who conducted studies on Oralism versus American Sign Language and Sociology of Deafness. Last year I donated two new books by deaf authors to the Main Library of Youngstown. This time, I was advised not to bring any more books due to the library's budget cuts. We pay taxes to keep libraries open for public use and I feel it is time to have new books on the History of the Deaf to bring public awareness on the 200 years of progress in Deaf America. This is the purpose of having the Ohio Senate Bill 27 on Ohio Deaf History Month which runs from March 13 to April 15.

Chairman Burke and Vice-Chairman Beagle and Members of the Health, Human Services and Medicaid Committee, on behalf of the Citizens of Deaf Cultures whom I represent, I thank you again for giving me the opportunity to share with you my testimony to support Ohio Senate Bill 27 on Ohio Deaf History Month.

Irene Tunanidas, M.Ed., M.S.
Poland, Ohio