



To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Dr. Patrick Graham, and I am the coordinator for the Teacher Preparation Program in Deaf and Hard of Hearing Education. I received my doctorate in Education Theory and Practice from the University of Georgia. My mentor was the internationally renowned anthropologist, Dr. Joseph Tobin.

I was born pre-lingually deaf to hearing parents. My parents did not know American Sign Language at all. When I was identified deaf at six months old, my parents inquired on what steps they needed to take. They learned that American Sign Language would be a good visual language for me to acquire. They received Early Intervention services and I started learning sign language and wearing hearing aids immediately after my diagnosis.

When I was three years old, I was already using sign language fluently. My parents decided that it would be a good idea for me to learn spoken English. They placed me in a school for the deaf that focused on oral methods. They still signed to me at home, because it was the most accessible language at the time. The more I was exposed to spoken English, the less I used American Sign Language.

American Sign Language provided me with a foundation for me to be confident and willing to learn Spoken English as a new language. I did not struggle to communicate with my parents or my peers, because I always had American Sign Language as a support. If I could not speak a specific word, I could finger-spell the word, or sign the word, and then learn how to speak the actual word.

There are so many children in the world who start out with spoken English. They may not have a supportive foundation that American Sign Language could offer. They are more at a risk for language deprivation than I was. I completely support this bill, for assessing children's language skills before it comes too late, and their foundation is weak. With this bill, we can see more children obtaining higher education and be on the path to success. I encourage our legislators to pass House Bill 3412, because I would like to see deaf children grow up to work in more fields such as deaf education, medicine, and legislation.

Sincerely,

Dr. Patrick Graham
Assistant Professor
Division of Deaf Studies and Professional Studies