



July 6, 2016

Meredith K. Sugar, President
Alexander Graham Bell
3417 Volta Place, NW
Washington, DC 20007

Dear President Sugar:

The West Virginia Association of the Deaf (WVAD) wishes to convey our grave disappointment concerning statements you made in response to the Washington Post article about Nyle DiMarco, Model, Actor, and Spokesperson for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing communities, who use American Sign Language (ASL) as our primary language.

WVAD was established in 1915 to serve individuals with the range of hearing loss in West Virginia. WVAD's mission is West Virginia Association of the Deaf, Inc., (WVAD) operated by, of, for the Deaf Community, advocates, and promotes to improve the quality of life for deaf and hard of hearing individuals including but not limited to deaf-blind individuals, parents of deaf children, interpreters, late-deafened adults, and children of deaf adults.

It is a proven fact that deaf and hard of hearing children will greatly benefit learning bilingual in ASL and English (as a language and communication mode) to develop language acquisition at earliest years of a child's life. ASL is a visual language that will provide deaf babies and children the early acquisition of language. Exposure to early language will enable children to expand their intelligent, social, emotional, and psychological development skills.

Language deprivation plays dangerous roles of leading the deaf and hard of hearing children, delaying their abilities of using language and communication mode. Research shows that children from birth to age 5 is a critical period of their life in learning the bilingual language. This is where Language Equality & Acquisition for Deaf Kids (LEAD-K) comes in the picture, to promote awareness on issues surrounding the importance of early language and literacy in Deaf children.

Deaf citizens in West Virginia who used listening and spoken language only realize how much they had their language deprived from them by not using ASL. They learned ASL much later in their lives and are thrilled that they are able to express their thoughts and feelings freely. Your organization should be forthcoming about hearing aids and cochlear implants, and spoken language only does not provide full access of comprehensiveness. ASL is 3rd popular language used in America; therefore, it is not declining but thriving!

It shouldn't matter if we can hear and speak or not. We all are human beings. Please respect our culture. We know what's best for us and can make our own decisions that we see fit.

We hope after you have received several letters, you will respect the value of the ASL as a language that the deaf and hard of hearing people prefer to use and are successful. We feel that your philosophy of listening and spoken language only is an absolute failure to the successful of communication.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "John W. Burdette".

John W. Burdette
President

cc: Ted A. Meyer, M.D., Ph.D., AGBell President-Elect
WVAD Board
National Association of the Deaf
Washington Post