Title: Campaign to Spotlight the Adverse Impacts of Language Deprivation

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Problem to be addressed:
Systemic barriers result in Deaf and hard of hearing infants and toddlers remaining at risk for language deprivation and having inadequate exposure to appropriate American Sign Language (ASL) language models and Deaf role models at a young age. Without appropriate measures in place and the NAD, to date, failing to take a public stance and hold those reprehensibly responsible for their transgressions, professionals and organizations primarily focused on restorative hearing and Deaf children’s ability to speak continue to pass along the burden of children’s failure to acquire language by iterating, “it’s the parent’s choice.”

Proposed Solution:
The goals of this motion are two-fold:
1. Renew the NAD’s mandate from 2012 on language deprivation, as well as renew the 2014 re-mandate due to the NAD’s failure to make sufficient progress on the 2012 mandate.
2. Establish a clear and public timeline for implementing strategies to achieve this priority, including model bills to be used to introduce at the federal and state levels.

By January 1, 2021, the NAD shall:
1. Establish an ad-hoc committee of individuals with expertise in various relevant areas including legal, educational and socio- and neuro-linguistic development to carry out the deliverables associated with this priority. This committee shall report to the NAD CEO or employee(s) designated by the NAD CEO.
2. Create and widely distribute ASL- and English-based press releases describing the reasons for pursuing this priority.
3. Create and widely distribute a timeline implementing strategies to achieve this priority.
4. Send a public letter to the Alexander Graham Bell Association for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (AG Bell) demanding that AG Bell disavow Alexander Graham Bell’s statements on Deaf people and sign language.
5. Collaborate with the State Association/Affiliate Committee (SAAC) to establish an independent ad-hoc committee, one that will consist of a combination of NAD board members and members of SAAC, to oversee and report progress on this priority to NAD members on a regular basis.

Before the next NAD Conference, the NAD shall at a minimum:
1. Develop model state and federal legislation that would hold entities and individuals responsible for actions causing harm to Deaf and hard of hearing infants/children by way of deprivation of ASL.
2. Develop model federal legislation and/or a rewrite of IDEA Part C to mandate the use of Deaf professionals in supporting language development among Deaf and hard of hearing infants and toddlers.
3. Develop model state legislation that would mandate contracted state and local early intervention programs to incorporate the use of Deaf professionals as a part of their comprehensive service model.

4. Develop model state and federal legislation that would require medical and audiology personnel to refer Deaf and hard of hearing infants/children and their families to ASL instruction and education prior to undertaking any medical procedure that may presume to provide hearing.

5. Develop an ASL resource kit to distribute nationwide to healthcare and early intervention providers working with Deaf and hard of hearing children and their families.

6. Develop and distribute standardized ASL Development Benchmarks and/or Checklists to be used by early interventionists and classroom teachers in schools across the country in evaluating progress and Kindergarten Readiness among all Deaf and hard of hearing children.

Rationale:
As mentioned in significant detail in the original priority motion in 2012, efforts to reform early intervention and Deaf education for Deaf children have experienced limited success. It is gravely unfortunate that eight years later we are in a similar position. This warrants mandating the original priority motion, one that was intended to introduce systematic changes to ensure Deaf children are not isolated and linguistically deprived and to reduce long-standing underemployment and unemployment rates among Deaf individuals. With recognition and appreciation of recent efforts to prevent language deprivation, there is a need to make those liable for past, current and future actions that cause harm to Deaf children by means of depriving children of ASL.

Furthermore, it is recommended an independent ad-hoc committee oversee and report progress on this priority. In the past, there have been discrepancies between delegates and NAD Board/Headquarters regarding the totality and efficacy of the work the NAD completed. The intention of this independent ad-hoc committee would be to mitigate discrepancies and report on the totality and efficacy of the work done under this priority.

Fiscal Impact:
Minimal. The work behind this will be mostly made up of volunteers. NAD’s staff contributions will be imperative to this priority and their time spent on this will have the biggest fiscal impact in the short- and long-term. NAD CEO will have full discretion to determine which staff members and, if appropriate, interns will contribute to the ad-hoc committee.

NAD Board/HQ Response:
Pursuant to the 2012 Mandate on Language Deprivation, the Public Policy Committee’s Education Group, which included experts from psychology, language development, education, special education law, and other areas created a position statement outlining the need for appropriate language acquisition: https://www.nad.org/about-us/position-statements/position-statement-on-early-cognitive-and-language-development-and-education-of-deaf-and-hard-of-hearing-children/

Further, a model bill (titled “Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children’s Right to Language Acquisition Act”) was developed with the purpose of reducing language deprivation for states to adopt and are available for state associations to use for lobbying purposes. This has been presented to state associations for their use but is not made publicly available to prevent giving away our game plan to those who have opposing interests.
A Language Deprivation Taskforce with community experts was established in 2012 and worked for 4 years to do a systemic analysis and this work continues with a broader coalition of organizations and universities committed to language access for deaf and hard of hearing children ages 0-5. This taskforce is known as the Language Accountability, Support, & Empowerment Roundtable (LASER). This has resulted in increased communication and research exchange to support systematic changes both on the state and national levels. This coalition includes VL2 which has already developed a Family Information Package that is available to families all over the country. [https://www.nad.org/resources/education/language-deprivation-taskforce/](https://www.nad.org/resources/education/language-deprivation-taskforce/).

Further, with respect to ASL standards and checklists, the Clerc Center with NAD encouragement has published ASL standards for grades K-12 which is publicly available and open for use.

Moreover, the NAD has encouraged states to look to LEAD-K as a template for their state to combat language deprivation, and have over the years worked with various state associations and affiliates to seek passage of LEAD-K in their respective states. To date, 14 states have passed various forms of LEAD-K legislation.

The NAD also developed and promoted to state associations and affiliates an updated model Deaf Child Bill of Rights. Again, this model bill is not shared publicly but is available to our affiliates for strategic reasons. Two states have recently passed this bill. This bill expands on ensuring that deaf children continue to build on language acquisition and have access to appropriate language models throughout their education.

With respect to modifying federal law, the reauthorization of the IDEA has been repeatedly postponed and we do not know when it will be up for debate, amendment, and passage. Nevertheless, we have worked with CEASD to propose the Cogswell-Macy Act to address some concerns regarding language development including specific provisions in Part C and Part B (to support families’ acquisition of ASL) in preparation for the time when Congress eventually reassesses the IDEA. We also have been meeting regularly with the U.S. Department of Education to push for key policy changes re: language access and environments, and we will not give up until those changes happen.

Our efforts have been extensive with respect to EHDI and ensuring that Deaf mentors are at the forefront of all early intervention efforts. We were instrumental in key changes to the EHDI Act in its reauthorization in 2017. As a result of these changes, every state is now required to provide visual resources and to establish Deaf mentor programs. This has been put in effect as of April 2020 along with the requirement for a national language acquisition assessment data collection. We have made significant progress in this regard and will not let up until every family is provided with Deaf mentors.

Our National Family Campaign priority report illustrates our ongoing efforts to reach out to every family who has a deaf child and show them the need to incorporate ASL in their deaf child’s education and development.
The NAD will continue this work and does not support the specific mandates of this priority as many of these are completed, but agree on the general goal of eradicating language deprivation of deaf and hard of hearing children.