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OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

April 30, 1959

The Hon. John E. Fogarty
House of Representatives
Washington 25, D. C.

My dear Mr. Fogarty:

I am sorry you are in the center of a controversy which is as old as the education of the deaf. I cannot understand how anything in my correspondence so far could have brought up this controversy over the methods of communication used by the deaf. I appreciate the fact that Dr. Wilkerson has examined many thousands of persons having hearing losses of various degrees, and I also appreciate the fact that there are very few totally deaf persons. That is the common experience of all audiologists and others who test hearing. But the fact remains that there are still 25,000 children in schools for the deaf, most having very severe hearing losses. This does not mean that they are not going to get oral instruction. No school for the deaf today educates the deaf child manually if there is any possible chance of his being educated orally. There is a State School for the Deaf in Knoxville, Tenn., headed by Mr. W. L. Graunke who has completed most of his work for a doctorate at Northwestern University under Dr. Myklebust and who is a staunch supporter of oral education; and I know, also, that the supervising teachers in that school are very strong oral advocates who would be very welcome additions to any of the so-called oral (private) schools for the deaf in the country. The same can be said of all the large residential schools for the deaf. Although Dr. Wilkerson does not state who these "Manualists" are, I assume he means those who have charge of the residential schools, because there are students who are manually taught in these schools. That is a well known fact, and it is not difficult to defend the use of the manual means of communication with these children. Even Dr. Wilkerson states: "I recognize the fact that the manual communication is important in a very small percentage of cases." Dr. Wilkerson could have been more specific if he had picked up his copy of the January, 1959, American Annals of the Deaf, which publication has been in

existence continuously since 1847, and looked on pages 120 and 121 where there is a listing of the methods of teaching used in the various schools. Of the 15,237 children in the 72 residential schools for the deaf, there are 9,601 who are taught orally, 995 non-orally (this is the group involved with manual communication), and 2,132 both orally and manually, meaning that some teachers work orally with them and some teachers manually. It is true that on the playground in the residential schools there are no determined efforts made to discourage the use of the manual means of communication because, for the deaf, whether we like it or not, this is the easiest means of communication.

Dr. Wilkerson will be interested to know that Gallaudet College is currently sponsoring a research project concerning the language of signs. I am enclosing some information on this. It is about time the language of signs is recongized for what it is, a definite language, and when linguists of the country will accept it as such there should be less criticism of it. This does not mean there will be any diminution in the use of the oral method of instruction. It does mean that the manual means of communication used by the majority of deaf adults will be recognized for what it is; a language.

I am totally at a loss to understand Dr. Wilkerson's statement that "Though it is unbelievable, the Manualists apparently resent the fact that progress has been made in developing oral speech in those patients that are considered deaf." Let me say, in the first place, that children in schools for the deaf are not patients; they are pupils. Too many of the clinics think of these children as patients, when in reality they are educable children making remarkable progress in spite of their physical handicap. If Dr. Wilkerson can name one "Manualist" among the educators of the deaf in the United States today, I should like to have the name. I would even go so far as to say if he can name one deaf person who resents the fact that progress has been made in developing oral speech, I should like to have the name of that person, also. There just aren't any. There are those who thoroughly believe that the manual means of communication has its place in the education of the deaf, but they are also interested in speech and very many of them have good speech and use it when the occasion presents itself. All they ask for is a realistic approach to the whole problem, and I think they have reason to feel the way they do because the so-called "Oralists" resent so thoroughly any means of manual communication. It is interesting to note, also, that many of the Oralists lose interest in the deaf person when he becomes an adult. The main reason for this is that the orally

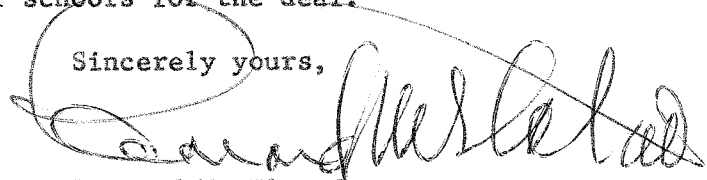
educated deaf child does not always speak readily and fluently enough for the Oralist to feel at home with him, and so he cuts him off his list of acquaintances.

If it is worth the time and money of three of the top men in the Ministry of Education in England, who are responsible for the education of the deaf in that country, where oralism has been the accepted means of instruction in all schools for many years, to come to this country and observe in our schools for the deaf, it certainly should be worth the time of those who have charge of the large clinics in the United States to spend some time in learning what is being done in the schools for the deaf. I am inclosing a photostat of a letter received this morning from the Speech and Hearing Center at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville. This is the second year this group has been here, and they come for a purpose. If others would do likewise there would be a better understanding of the situation, and the deaf child would be benefitted. It is this lack of elementary information on this whole question that gives us concern when a bill such as H. J. Res. 316 is to be considered. If there is so little understanding of the basic facts of the education of the deaf it is highly essential that legislation be worded so that no possible advantage to the deaf child can possibly be lost.

I am inclosing an extra copy of this letter so that you may send it on to Dr. Wilkerson. I don't know whether you have sent copies of my other letters but, if not, I do hope you will; otherwise I should write Dr. Wilkerson myself.

Again may I say that I do appreciate your time and interest in this matter. I think it is very important that you be acquainted with the situation from all viewpoints. These are mine and I rather feel they represent the views of most of the administrators of residential schools for the deaf.

Sincerely yours,



Leonard M. Elstad
President

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