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April 4, 2016

To: Ann Pugh, House Human Services Chair
From: Monica Caserta Hutt, Commissioner
Re: S.66 Re-draft: An Act relating to persons who are Deaf, Deaf/Blind or Hard of Hearing

As a representative of both the Agency and of DAAIL, I have been working with an informal Council related to individuals who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Deaf/Blind since November, 2015 and with an interested group of stakeholder for a year prior to that time. Originally, the group came together in response to a request from the Senate Government Operations Committee to fulfill the intent of S. 66 related to the development of a system of care for individuals who were deaf, hard of hearing or deaf/blind. The informal Council, recognizing the need to go beyond an exclusive focus on children and school services, arranged itself into four subcommittees: early childhood, school-aged, adults and elders. Those subcommittees guaranteed that we could review, assess and build recommendations relative to services, supports and a comprehensive system of care across the lifespan.

In reviewing the original S.66, as a Council we identified two areas of primary concern which we believed warranted modification. The first was to shift the originally proposed Task Force to a formal Advisory Council without a sunset provision. The second was to expand the focus for recommendations beyond early childhood and school-aged children. The new version of S.66 accomplishes both of these goals and offers an opportunity for the Council to work across state government to review and assess supports for individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing and deaf/blind across the lifespan, strengthening the entire Vermont system and the entire Vermont community.

I would also note that the re-drafted bill represents a strong collaboration across departments of the Agency of Human Services, between AHS and the Agency of Education, and in partnership with the Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Deaf/Blind community. This version of S.66 has the full support of both the Department of Disabilities, Aging and Independent Living and the Agency of Human Services.

Thank you.