EXHIBIT 7
DATE 1/26/07
HB 354

To: Committee members House Education
From: Steve Gettel, Superintendent MSDB
Date: January 26, 2007
RE: Testimony on HB 354

The OPI 2005-06 Child Count at total of 198; 41 deaf and 157 hard of hearing school age students served.

MSDB outreach consultants currently serve 101 school age children; 28 deaf and 73 hard of hearing.

10 of these students attended school in districts that employ trained teachers of the deaf.

This is 51% of the198 (2005-06) students identified in the OPI Child Count.

Of the deaf and hard of hearing children identified in the OPI child count 51 or 26% were enrolled at MSDB in 2005-06.

The outreach program also serves 11 infants and toddlers under the age of 3 years.

Four school districts employ trained teachers of the deaf; Malta, Missoula County, Billings and Bozeman.

Under the provisions of HB 354 MSDB would anticipate requests for recommendations on between 140 and 150 deaf and hard of hearing students in 2007-08.

There are no training programs to prepare teachers of the deaf in Montana.

Teachers can become licensed and endorsed to teach deaf and hard of hearing student through two procedures;

complete a general education degree and the requirements for a general special education endorsement at a college or university in Montana or,

complete a general education or other earned degree in Montana or another state and complete a course of study in the area of deaf education. This second approach must be reviewed by the OPI to ensure that a minimum number of credits has been earned in the area of general education.

Barriers to recruiting teachers of the deaf over the past 5 years have included;

A lack of available and affordable training programs. Most programs are 2 year, 6 semester programs with tuition costs ranging from $12,000 to $40,000 after OSEP grants have been applied,

A nationwide shortage of trained teachers of the deaf,

Starting wages that are not competitive. Though progress has been made on increasing wages, teacher at MSDB earn on average $5,174 less than teacher in the Great Falls Public Schools. The entry level salary for a teacher with a M.Ed. at MSDB is $28,080. Starting salaries in neighboring states, for teachers who have completed a course of study in deaf education range from $30,000 at the Idaho School to $37,626 at the Washington School. At the California School at Riverside the salary is $45,624.

The Office of Public Instruction reported 37.6 interpreters worked in public schools in Montana in 2005-06. MSDB employs 9 interpreters and 14 teachers of the deaf.

The data on children served through the MSDB outreach program indicates 26 preschool and school age children living in their local communities use a sign language system.

The course of study for educational interpreters are moving from 2 year certificate programs to 4 year degree programs.

By 2008 the curriculum at the Distance Opportunities for Interpreter Training (DO-IT Center) at the University of Northern Colorado, Greeley (formerly the Educational Interpreter Certificate Program at Front Range Community College) will consist of an 11 semester/120 credit undergraduate degree program with a tuition cost of $28,320 of which $20,000 is anticipated to be subsidized by an OSEP grant.

The program at Idaho State University has a 64 credit associate degree option in sign language. This is required for entrance into the Educational Interpreter Program which is a 2 year 64 semester hour program. The cost for tuition for this 4 year degree program is approximately $16,800.

Questions for consideration related to personnel preparation and implementation of standards include;

How will the availability, accessibility and cost of training programs affect the number of candidates willing to enter the field?

Assuming standards will include a provision for employment based on assessment performance, how will assessment criteria impact the current pool of educational interpreters?

How will recruitment and retention activities be impacted by standards?

How will rates of compensation for educational interpreters be affected by the cost of training and assessment?

The MSDB believes that standards are necessary to ensure the quality of signed communication meets the needs of the children. Section 2 is supported by the National Association of State Directors of Special Education "Educational Service Guidelines" for "Meeting the Needs of Students Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing," which state, "Educational Personnel who work

with students who are deaf or heard of hearing should be proficient in the language that provides the best possible access to content and be able to communicate with a student in ways that facilitate continuous language and literacy development and learning," and, "When recruiting, employing and evaluating interpreters, state and local administrators should adhere to state and national standards of practice."

MSDB is aware of the difficulty local districts, particularly rural districts have in providing appropriate services for deaf children because of the unique nature of the disability, the need for accommodations necessary to provide access to the curriculum, instruction, general information and extra curricular activities, as well as facilitating communication with support staff and classmates, when a child can not hear.

Because of this, in 2001 the School began a process of program assessment and strategic planning which has served as the basis for requests through the executive planning process in the 2003, 05, and 07 legislative sessions.

In 2002 MSDB conducted a phone survey of 4 western states including Oregon, Idaho, Utah and Arizona to determine a regionally based number that would serve as a standard for caseload numbers for students served through outreach. Though service delivery models varied to some degree caseloads ranged from a low of 8 students in Utah to high of 16 students in Oregon.

In 2002, for the executive planning process for the 2005 biennium, the School requested the addition of 5 consultants to provide a total of 10 consultants to work with 246 students both deaf and blind. This request was not approved.

In 2004, for the executive planning process for the 2007 biennium, the School again requested the addition of 5 consultants to provide a total of 10 consultants to work with 292 students both deaf and blind. This request was not approved. However, through efforts of the Montana Association of the Blind, HB 438, an act providing Braille services to blind or visually impaired children, sponsored by Representative Buzzas and at that time Senator Lewis, did pass and provided an additional 4 consultants to work with the 188 visually impaired students served in local districts across the state.

In 2006, for the executive planning process for the 2009 biennium, the School requested the addition of 6 consultants to provide a total of 15 consultants to work with now 339 students both deaf and blind. The budget office approved the request for 4 positions; funding of $227,663 in FY 2008 and $221,509 in FY 2009 and 3.08 FTE which is included in the executive budget. This proposal was heard and approved by the Joint Subcommittee on Education on January 12th. The school supports the executive budget for the addition of 4 consultants which will bring the outreach staff to a total of 13.

The approval of this proposal continues to move the school incrementally toward its goal of providing one outreach consultant for every 25 children referred to the program.

The Executive budget also includes the addition of $42,626 and .73 FTE and $56,318 and .77 FTE in each year of the 09 biennium for a guidance/behavioral counselor and a consulting audiologist.

These positions will prove to be a valuable resource to local districts in assessing the needs of, and developing intervention plans, and promoting success;

for deaf children with significant behavior or emotional disorders providing those students with greater success in their education in their home districts.

for providing consultation and technical assistance for this rapidly growing area of medical intervention through the cochlear implants and to coordinated audiological services from MSDB's early intervention program, with the Part C providers and the Hearing Conservation Program.

The appropriations section of HB 354 parallels a portion of the School's improvement plan and would provide for 6 additional consultants for the deaf while the appropriation in HB 2 would provide for 4 consultants for the outreach program to be assigned to the program overall based on current student referrals from each disability area and the goal to achieve a ratio of 25 children for each consultant program wide.

With the total number of school age children known through the state child count (198 less 41 students at MSDB and 10 students served by teachers of the deaf in 4 local districts for a total of 147 school age children) and a 32% (14) increase in the number of deaf and hard of hearing infants and toddlers referred to the program as a result of the Universal Newborn Hearing Screening program, the school anticipates the number of children covered under the provisions of Section 1 of this bill, as well infants and toddlers served through outreach, would increase from 112 in FY07 to 161 in FY08.

In this case if HB 354 were to pass, based on current numbers of students served with consideration for a 32% increase in the number infants and toddlers referred 8 consultants would have average caseloads of 20 deaf or hard of hearing children.

Based on current numbers of students served with consideration for a 32% increase in the number infants and toddlers referred, under the new proposal in the Executive budget the average caseload will drop from an average 38 to 26 children. If 1 of the additional positions is assigned to VI students and 3 are assigned to deaf and hard of hearing students the average caseload will drop from 32 to 29 for the consultants for the visually impaired and from 55 to 32 for the consultants of the deaf and hard of hearing.