

Improving Special Education for Children Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

The Alexander Graham Bell Association for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

What Is the Children's Legal Advocacy Program? (CLA)

The Children's Legal Advocacy Program (CLA), established in 2001, is an endeavor by the Alexander Graham Bell Association for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (AG Bell) to support the needs of children who are deaf or hard of hearing and require early intervention or appropriate education placement and/or services.

Through experienced legal representation to families in carefully selected cases, the Program is designed to safeguard and expand legal protection for our children, and to raise public awareness of the needs of children with hearing loss whose families have chosen an oral approach to communication.

The Program's premise is simple and based on the lawyer's truism that good cases make good law. By providing legal representation experienced in special education law in cases that have the potential to produce good legal precedent, the educational rights of children with hearing loss, which includes oral communication, will be preserved.

For example, in the past, the program's lawyers successfully represented parents in California who sought appropriate early intervention services for their toddler that provided an oral education and that required personnel to have sufficient training and experience to work with a child with a cochlear implant. In another case in Florida, the Program's attorneys successfully secured a decision that held that a preschool placement in an exceptionalities classroom with children that had various developmental disabilities did not provide a child who was implanted and seeking the oral mode of communication a free appropriate public education.

Types of Cases Considered By the CLA

Preference is given to cases in which the infant/child has been exposed to oral communication from the outset and whose challenges are primarily related to the condition of hearing loss or deafness. AG Bell promotes all forms of oral communication and education, spoken language and auditory learning, including auditory/oral and Auditory-Verbal approaches. AG Bell does not seek to undertake cases that attempt to establish that a certain oral approach is preferable than another.

How does it work?

Step 1: All potential cases are reviewed by AG Bell staff who collects preliminary information and documentation including current and proposed IFSP/IEPs, test results and child evaluations. The CLA program selection committee then reviews this information.

Step 2: For those families whose situations present the potential to create meaningful legal precedent, the attorneys who will be providing representation will conduct a second interview.

Step 3: If the case demonstrates potential, an attorney will travel to the family, review the situation and interview potential witnesses.

Step 4: Finally, those families who meet the program's qualifications will be notified and accepted.

How do I find out if my situation is eligible?

To discuss your situation or arrange an informational meeting, please call 716-362-1113 or email cla@agbell.org.

What If I apply and am not accepted?

Because the program considers cases with potential to generate wide reaching, clear legal precedent, we are forced to be very selective. The program chooses cases carefully based on specific criteria that reflect the goals of the program. The fact that the program does not choose your case does not reflect on the importance of your need, or the likelihood of success. All families are able to benefit from the Association's membership benefits, information and publications located at www.agbell.org.