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April 5, 2016

Ms. Meredith K. Sugar, President
Alexander Graham Bell Association for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing
3417 Volta Place Northwest
Washington, DC 20007

President Sugar,

The Board of the American Society for Deaf Children (ASDC) wishes to convey our grave disappointment concerning the statements you made in response to the Washington Post's article, "Dancing with the Stars contestant is vying for a White House Correspondents' Dinner Invite." We applaud our many colleagues, such as NAD, who have already sent letters to you highlighting the numerous research studies that refute claims you made in that statement. We hope you have also seen the outrage on social media concerning your statements directed at Nyle DiMarco.

ASDC is the oldest national organization founded and governed by parents of Deaf Children. We believe that parents deserve thorough and unbiased information in order to make the best choices for their Deaf children. Our organization is committed to empowering families with Deaf children to embrace full access to language-rich environments through mentoring, advocacy, resources, and collaborative networks. The research tells us that language-rich environments for these children, by definition, include both ASL and English. Bilingualism serves children better, simply stated.

You claim to be "dispelling myths about deafness." In our view, AG Bell continues to provide misleading and harmful information to the public and especially to parents, about deafness and Deaf people. AG Bell refuses to acknowledge that thousands of Deaf individuals, who have been raised by parents influenced by AG Bell policies, are themselves now against AG Bell policies.

"Based on current research results¹, it is our professional opinion that your organization has actually been spreading myths. One, you indicate that if parents use ASL, their child will not learn to use spoken English. This is simply false. Secondly, AG Bell perpetuates the myth that families will "lose their child to Deaf Culture," if they chose to use ASL. This also is false. The world is full of Deaf adults who are fluent in both ASL and English. And there are many who use spoken language in situations that warrant it. (1. Language acquisition for deaf children: Reducing the harms of zero tolerance to the use of alternative approaches. *Tom Humphries, Poorna Kushalnagar, Gaurav Mathur, Donna Jo Napoli, Carol Padden, Christian Rathmann and Scott R Smith*).

AG Bell has a long history of parading stories reflecting a small percentage of children who hear and speak very well. In most cases, their childhood years were full of visits to medical appointments and hours and hours of speech therapy. In reality, the ability to speak or hear does not define the success of Deaf individuals nor is it a reflection of their intelligence. Nyle DiMarco is a prime example of this. And there are plenty of individuals like him whom parents of Deaf children should be educated about, and AG Bell ought to embrace this truth and add this fact to their message.

Finally, AG Bell should be fully forthcoming about the fact that hearing aids and cochlear implants do not provide full access to the world of spoken language. Research proves this. (e.g., Davidson et. al. 2014, Hassanzadeh, 2012). Research shows that Deaf individuals that grow up with both signed and spoken languages do better in all areas. (e.g., Lund, 2015).

Last but far from least, AG Bell should be aware of the growing interest in ASL in Deaf people as a cultural group. ASL is now the 3rd most commonly studied language in colleges and universities. So the use of ASL is not declining, at all. Rather, it is alive and well and thriving.

A parent said: *"It makes a huge difference when we stop thinking about what we want, what we need, or what makes ourselves comfortable, and instead join in our children's journeys"*

We hope you will visit www.deafchildren.org and learn more about our resources and how we can support you and your organization. A true partnership between AG Bell and ASDC would truly be what all Deaf children and their families deserve.

Sincerely,

Avonne Brooker-Rutowski
ASDC President

cc: ASDC Board Members

