

# THE WISCONSIN COMMUNICATOR

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HANDS &  
VOICES

## Coffee Clutches

The first round of coffee clutches were held in November and December. These were such a big hit that there are more events scheduled around the state for the month of Feb. Be sure and check out [www.handsandvoiceswi.org](http://www.handsandvoiceswi.org) for gatherings in your area!!

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## Come Visit Us In Stevens Point!!

Come meet some of the Wisconsin Families for Hands & Voices board members at the 2008 Family Conference and let us know what we can do for you!!

We will have a table set up in the vendor area of the conference.

## 6TH ANNUAL STATEWIDE FAMILY CONFERENCE “LOOKING AHEAD TO A BRIGHT FUTURE”

The 6th Annual Statewide Family Conference is scheduled for March 7-9, 2008 at the Ramada Hotel in Stevens Point, WI.

The goal of the conference is to bring families of children who are deaf, hard of hearing, and deafblind together in a supportive, educational, and enjoyable atmosphere. The conference offers the opportunity for valuable personal contact with parents and children from around the state of Wisconsin, as well as professionals in the field through workshops,

discussion groups, and vendor exhibits. The conference is designed with many fun, educational activities to support your family's development and growth.

The keynote speaker, Dr Deb Gough, will focus her keynote on “As your Child Grows: Decisions, Transitions, and Challenges that Lead to a Bright Future” Other beginning and advanced level topics are scheduled. A detailed workshop list and registration forms can be found at [www.wesp-dhh.wi.gov](http://www.wesp-dhh.wi.gov) or



by contacting Laurie Nelson at 608-266-6438 or [laurie.nelson@wesp-dhh.wi.gov](mailto:laurie.nelson@wesp-dhh.wi.gov).

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## INTRODUCTION LETTER BY NEW BOARD MEMBER TRACIE HAPPEL

My name is Tracie Happel and I'm a new member on the Hands and Voices board. I'm really excited to be part of an innovative group of people committed to empowering deaf and hard of hearing families.

I've been married for 12 years and my husband and I have two great kids, one daughter and one son. I got involved in working

with people who are deaf a long time ago. That was supposed to be a part-time “thing,” but 20 years and a lot of higher education later, I'm still here!

Currently, I teach middle school students who are deaf. Interestingly enough, God does work in mysterious ways as our daughter was diagnosed with a hearing loss when she was 4

years old. Her loss has progressed where she now wears bilateral hearing aids.

My perspective on the board is both professional and personal. I hope to make a positive difference for the families of Wisconsin while serving with Hands and Voices.

## WI Families for Hands & Voices

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Email: [handsandvoiceswi@yahoo.com](mailto:handsandvoiceswi@yahoo.com)

We are on the web!  
[www.handsandvoiceswi.org](http://www.handsandvoiceswi.org)

## Board Members

Molly Martzke  
President

Laurie Nelson  
Vice President

Connie Breaker  
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Carolyn Bossert  
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Holly Bauer

Alicia Boehme

Marcy Dicker

Jen Evans

Tracie Happel

Michelle Kihntopf

Elizabeth Seeliger

## Legislation Update: A Call to Action

By: Alicia Boehme

As you all know, Senate Bill 88 passed the Senate, and is now awaiting action in the Assembly.

**We are at a critical point in time right now.** The bill was assigned to the Committee on Insurance on January 10th, which is run by Frank Lasee. Representative Lasee has not been responsive to parents and advocates who are fighting for the bill, and it is very possible that he will not put the bill up for a hearing and a vote. If he does not put this bill up for a hearing and a vote, the bill will die. Another strategy that Frank Lasee could use is to put the bill up for a hearing, but put it up too late for it to get on the Assembly calendar for a floor vote.

**So, we need to advocate NOW for the bill to be put to a hearing and a vote ASAP. The goals are to: convince Frank Lasee to hold a hearing and a vote on SB88; and to advocate for your representative talk to Frank Lasee about putting the bill up for a hearing and a vote AND, of course to vote for the bill when the time comes.**

1) WRITE FRANK LASEE and copy the other members of the Committee on Insurance to encourage him to have a hearing and a vote on this bill as soon as possible. You can access a list of names and addresses of Frank Lasee and the other members of the Committee on Insurance through the following link: <http://www.legis.state.wi.us>.

In your letter you should consider addressing the following points:

- Ask Frank Lasee to put SB88 up for a hearing as soon as possible and that your voice deserves to be heard on this issue!
- If you are a voter in Frank Lasee's district, let him know you are a voter! (\*\*This is very important to say because elected officials listen to people who vote).
- Let them know who you are (i.e., you are a parent of a child who is deaf/hard of hearing; you are person who is deaf/hard of hearing etc.)
- Briefly explain why this issue is important to you and why it is important for this issue to be put up for a hearing.
- Ask him to respond to you to let you know whether or not he plans to hold a hearing.

2) WRITE YOUR ASSEMBLY REPRESENTATIVE

To find out who represents you, check out: <http://waml.legis.state.wi.us/>

In your letter consider letting your representative know the following points:

That you deaf and hard of hearing to get hearing aids and cochlear implants paid for by insurance companies

**Tell them that you are concerned that the bill will not be put up for a hearing in Frank Lasee's committee on insurance and that you would like them to contact Frank Lasee to encourage him to hold both a hearing and a vote on the bill as soon as possible.**

Let them know that you live in their district, and tell that you are a voter if you are one... (\*\*This is very important to say because elected officials listen to people who vote).

Explain why this bill is important: TELL YOUR STORY. Let your senator know if you have a child who is deaf or hard of hearing, if you are deaf or hard of hearing yourself, if you are a professional who works with children/adults who have hearing loss or are deaf, if you are a family member or a friend ... etc. and let them know why passing this bill is important to you personally.

Tell your senator any hardships related to affording hearing aids or cochlear implants.

Give some facts: for example:

- Approximately 200 children in the State of Wisconsin who are deaf or hard of hearing are born each year.
- Families in Wisconsin are struggling to pay for hearing aids and cochlear implants. Some families are not able to afford them.
- Hearing loss impacts language development, speech development and social interaction with the hearing world.
- It will cost much more in the long run for our state to educate and provide therapies and supports to children.
- ... there are many other points/arguments you can make. ...

Ask them to respond to you to let you know if they contacted Representative Lasee and also to let you know if they plan on supporting the bill when it is up for a vote.

Finally, if the bill does get assigned a hearing, we may have short notice to testify. Be prepared to rearrange your schedules. The more people who can come to testify, the better! My understanding is that the Committee on Insurance typically meets on odd numbered Thursdays.

**SPREAD THE WORD: GET OTHERS TO WRITE LETTERS TO THEIR SENATORS TOO!** If you have family or friends or teachers or audiologists or others who want this bill passed, they should write a letter to their senator as well.