

Target publication: Deaf Victoria

Youth Parliament passes Deaf Victoria Bill to make Auslan a mandatory subject



YMCA's 2021 Victorian Youth Parliament Sitting Week saw four students from the Deafhood team pass their motion for Auslan (Australian Sign Language) to be implemented as a compulsory LOTE (Languages Other Than English) subject across all Victorian schools. Their Bill, tabled on behalf of Deaf Victoria, the state's peak advocacy body for Deaf and Hard of Hearing citizens, is now in the process of being drafted by the Greens, to be debated in Victoria's State Parliament.

The team, consisting of Alec Christofi-Halliday, Precious Dennis, Malachi Kruse and Shadrak Niyonita, proposed all Foundation to Year 10 students in Victoria be taught Auslan, as part of a Bill aiming to foster an equal and more inclusive school environment for Deaf and Hard of Hearing students.

Their Bill is part of a push to overcome the gap in educational standards between Deaf and hearing students. Whilst Auslan is offered as a LOTE subject by some Victorian schools, the youth parliamentarians believed this was evidently not sufficient to address the widespread discrepancies in teaching and learning faced by many Deaf pupils. What's more, Deaf Victoria have explained how, despite there being a shortage of workers to meet rising demand for an Auslan subject, the government is yet to undertake any initiatives to address this scarcity.

Consequently, because they are given lower priority, and not regarded as equivalent to their hearing peers, Precious argued Deaf students “are continuously facing barriers, even in their own education system.”

By implementing a mandatory Auslan subject, as well as increasing and improving Deaf Awareness Training (DAT) in Victoria's education curriculum, the team aim to promote greater awareness of the Deaf Community and Deaf culture amongst hearing people. Because as Malachi said, “we're all part of the same world.”

This need for understanding and awareness was a focal point during Tuesday's parliamentary debate.

“There are misconceptions about Deaf people, but we are just as smart, and intelligent, and funny, as everyone else,” asserted Precious.

Alongside promoting awareness of the Deaf Community, the team also hope their Bill will contribute to the disintegration of longstanding barriers preventing Deaf people from accessing equal opportunities in education and employment.

“We don't want these barriers for Deaf people in the future. Our hope is Deaf people will be able to break these barriers, and just be able to progress further, as far as they would like to,” Malachi said.

Put simply, their overall long-term goal can be encapsulated by Alec's wish “just to look around, and [see] things changing.”

While the team acknowledged the disadvantages faced by Deaf people may take many years to completely disappear, they said the passing of the Bill by Youth Parliament was nonetheless “a step in the right direction,” and hope it will contribute to the building of a more inclusive, accessible community.