

Opens Telephone Campaign for Hard of Hearing

By NORMA BOWKETT

FAIRBANKS — Mrs. Laura Bergt of Fairbanks has opened a telephone campaign urging public support of two bills in the state legislature which would provide for in-state care for deaf children.

Mrs. Bergt says she has been informed that both bills — House Bill 706 and Senate Bill 340 — have a good chance of passing if enough individuals who wish to have handicapped children educated within the state make their wishes known in Juneau.

Deaf children now are forced to go out of the state for their education because of a lack of adequate facilities needed for

their education.

During the past year Mrs. Bergt has been campaigning for in-state educational facilities for the handicapped child.

She and other parents of handicapped children have sent a wire to John Antonen, Special Education Consultant with the Department of Education in Juneau, asking that state officials visit the Fairbanks school district classes for the deaf and hard of hearing because the parents

“strongly feel that this already

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Telephone Campaign..

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established class should be strengthened to facilitate the educational, emotional and financial needs of children and parents of Interior and Northern Alaska. . ."

Existing facilities in Fairbanks for the deaf and hard of hearing child are good, Mrs. Bergt says, and could be expanded to serve the needs of children in surrounding areas.

In keeping with the recommendations of the State Task Force on Education, Mrs. Bergt favors regional schools for the handicapped child: one in Fairbanks, one in Anchorage, and one in Bethel, since so many children from villages near Bethel suffer hard of hearing caused by otitis media, an ear infection.

Under the provisions of House Bill 706, funds would be appropriated from the general fund to be used by the Department of Education for "contracting for centralized services for the profoundly deaf for the fiscal year ending June 30, 1973, to take effect on July 1, 1972.

Mrs. Bergt would like to see some of these funds used to strengthen the classes for the deaf and hard of hearing held in Fairbanks.

Many families in Interior and Northern Alaska have relatives here in Fairbanks, she says, and it would be better for those families if their children could attend classes here.

Originally, the amount to be appropriated under House Bill 706 was \$365,040, but, according to Jim Wolfe, head of the legislative office in Fairbanks, the amount was raised by the House Finance Committee and the bill was passed by the lower chamber and is now in the senate.

Senate Bill 340, he said, has cleared the senate and is in the house.

Under the provisions of this bill, school districts which could not provide special education for children would pay per pupil costs for students transferred to school districts which could provide special education for them. The state would provide funds for necessary care, transportation, instruction and room and board.

At the present time, Mrs. Bergt says, deaf children from Alaska are sent to schools in Utah and Canada for their education. In some cases, she says, parents have refused to let their children go out of state because they did not want their children uprooted from their homes.

Her own daughter Karen is hard of hearing, she says, and has had to go outside to school twice because the Fairbanks district did not then have classes for the deaf and hard of hearing.

Now Karen attends school in Fairbanks.

"The teachers are up to date," Mrs. Bergt says, "and are constantly researching and keep-

ing up to date on the education of the deaf and hard of hearing."

Earlier this year, citing statistics provided by the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the State Department of Education, Mrs. Bergt wrote a letter to members of the Alaska State Legislature urging them to act this year to establish at least one state school for the handicapped.

Her letter, she was told by legislators, sparked their interest in the problem. As a result, the House Health, Welfare and Education Committee conducted a public hearing on the education of the deaf, hard of hearing and blind, and, at a later time, House Bill 706 and Senate Bill 340 were drafted.

Passage of these bills, Mrs. Bergt says, "would essentially strengthen programs in the state, both in Anchorage and Fairbanks right now . . . Both districts have an opportunity "to expand their facilities to take care of their particular regions."