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To: Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment
of Civilians

From: Hannah Tomiko Holmes (nee, Takagi)

My name is Hannah Tomiko Holmes, formerly Takagi. I have previously submitted a statement to the Commission outlining the experiences of my family and myself during World War Two, and have requested a place on the Commission's agenda during its August hearings in Los Angeles. I am now 53 years old, and I have been deaf since the age of two.

I am submitting this supplemental statement at the request of Mr. Paul Bannai, the Commission's executive director, who expressed the lack of familiarity of the commission members, and the public at large, with the many problems which were faced by Japanese children who suffered from deafness and other disabilities during World War Two. I want the Commission to know how Japanese children were excluded from every public institution for deaf, blind, and other handicapped children on the west coast of the United States. I want the Commission to know

how the educational needs of deaf, blind, and handicapped Japanese children were neglected by the War Relocation Authority during World War Two. I want the Commission to know how some of the children never recovered from the disruption of their education, how some were not even able to resume their education after war was over.

In his published memoirs, the former WRA administrator Dillon S. Myer, states ". . .the welfare services provided for residents without adequate means of support as well as for orphans and the handicapped, were similar to those furnished by the normal city. . ."

(Dillon S. Myer, Uprooted Americans, page 55). From my personal experience, which I shall describe in detail, and from documents which I have secured pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act (see Attachment One), I will be able to show the Commission how services were not provided for the handicapped. I would like the Commission to exercise its fact-finding powers to discover the reasons for why our needs were not addressed by WRA and other officials.

I would like the Commission to recommend to Congress that payments be made directly to all hearing-impaired Nisei who were subjected to the evacuation orders for the deprivation of our right to an equal education.

I.

When the war started, I was a 13 year old student at the California School for the Deaf, a school for children ages 6 through 20 sponsored by the State of California Board of Education in Berkeley, California. I was one of eleven Japanese students at the California School for the Deaf who were eventually forced to leave because of the war (see Attachment Two, a copy of a letter from WRA acting regional director E.M.Rowalt to the Arkansas School for the Deaf listing the former students at the California School for the Deaf). A twelfth Japanese student, Ronald Hirano, was allowed to stay at the California School for the Deaf during the war, under the guidance of Dr. Delight Rice, through arrangements between the school, WRA, and the Hirano family--I am not sure how Mr. Hirano was allowed to stay behind in school. I arrived to Manzanar with my family in May, 1942, and we began at once to try to find a way for me to return to the California School for the Deaf; however, by this time, the school was not allowing anyone else to return.

There were many other children from other schools for handicapped students on the west coast (see Attachment

Three, pages one through three, a list of all public and private school facilities for deaf, blind, physically and mentally disabled children in California, Oregon, and Nevada compiled by WRA). However, WRA was not able to make arrangements for any of the children to leave camp to return to school anywhere on the west coast. For example, there were three children in camp who I knew had come from the State of Washington; some attempt was made to return one of them to a facility in Vancouver, Washington, but nothing came of it (see Attachment Four, pages one and two, letter from Seattle Public Schools to WRA re: finding schooling for three children from Seattle).

In short, although some education was offered to non-handicapped children at Manzanar, including classes through high school, children who suffered from handicaps had to do without. In my own case, I had no education or training at all. A lady named E. Thomas was "assigned" to take care of deaf, blind, and other handicapped children, however, she didn't do anything for us at all. I remember once trying to ask her for more educational help, and she told me that she was just too busy. I have obtained a report prepared by Miss Thomas about me during 1943, and

you can see for yourself how inadequate was the "curriculum". We were taught history and math at a level far below what we had already learned. She never really taught us typing; I taught myself (see Attachment Five, pages one and two, memos from E. Thomas re: Hannah Takagi, January 21, 1943 and May 1, 1943). Later, the principal of the Manzanar elementary school, E.B. Dykes, wrote a memo in which he had the nerve to say that my family did not appreciate the "services of the school"! (see Attachment Six, memo from E.B. Dykes).

I felt terribly isolated from other children at Manzanar. I could not communicate with them. Somehow I managed to do work at the camouflage net factory.

I tried to continue my education on my own by reading a lot.

In May 1943 my parents moved us to Tule Lake where an attempt was being made to start a school for handicapped children. It was called the Helen Keller School. Unfortunately, the Helen Keller School at Tule Lake proved not to be successful, and closed in only a few months. Children suffering from deafness, blindness, mental retardation, physical paralysis, were all lumped into one class under the supervision of a teacher from New York who understood the needs of none of us. She did not allow me to use sign language!

It was after we were all given the "loyalty questionnaires" that the school broke up, as some children were assigned to different locations. I never benefited from any of the Tule Lake School's attempts to "teach" me.

During late 1942 and in 1943 WRA officials made a half-hearted attempt to find facilities for myself and other deaf children outside of camp. An attempt was made to obtain classes for us at the Arkansas School for the Deaf (see Attachment Seven, letter from superintendent of Arkansas School for the Deaf); the Arkansas school said that it would have a Board meeting to decide whether we could be admitted, but nothing ever came of it; it's my understanding that the Arkansas school wouldn't admit black children either. Another attempt was made to place us at the Idaho School for the Deaf and Blind in Gooding, Idaho, but Idaho demanded "non-resident" tuition of \$500/year be paid; WRA did not pay the tuition, and, of course, as our families were not gainfully employed, we did not pay the tuition either (see Attachment Eight, letter from State of Idaho superintendent of school). A similar "tuition" excuse was offered by the Colorado School for the Deaf and Blind, stating that state law prohibited me from enrolling in Colorado--I wonder if that was true?(see Attachment Nine,

letter from Colorado School for Deaf and Blind to my sister, Ruth Takagi). WRA also would not pay the \$780 non-resident tuition asked for by the Pennsylvania School for the Deaf (see Attachment Ten, letter from National Japanese American Student Relocation Council in Philadelphia re: Pennsylvania School for the Deaf). The same result in our inquiries to the Jane Brooks School for the Deaf at Purcell, Oklahoma (see Attachment Eleven, letter from WRA re Purcell school). In the meantime, the education of myself and other deaf children continued to be non-existent.

It was not until September 1943 that my family was allowed to move to Chicago, where I enrolled in the Alexander Graham Bell School for the Deaf; alas, the school did not use sign language, but used only the inferior oralism lip reading method of communication. (see Attachment Twelve, re: first placement in Chicago). In early 1944 I finally found a place in the Illinois School for the Deaf, which was tuition free as my family was now considered Illinois residents, and that is where I studied until my graduation in the Class of 1948. Another former California School for the Deaf student, Satoru Shiratsuki, graduated from the same school earlier in 1946.

By continuing to do a lot of reading on my own in camp, I was ready to continue my education in Illinois when the opportunity finally arose. However, many other children were not strong enough to keep themselves ready for further education, and some never returned to school at all. Of the students from California School for the Deaf, I know that Toru Gotori, Teruka Kubotsu, and Yoshiko Kawahisa were never able to pick up the pieces and return to school again. Choko Hayashi, the student from Seattle whom the Seattle School District was so concerned over, never returned to school. I believe that many of the other children from the other schools, who were forced to discontinue their educations absolutely during camp, were never able to return to school, and have suffered the effects of not having an education all their lives. I would like the Commission to do everything it can to find out what happened to the other deaf children after the war.

II.

Although the Helen Keller school at Tule Lake was unsuccessful, I would like to tell of one truly rewarding experience. In the early days at Tule Lake, when we still had some hopes for the school, I wrote to Helen Keller herself

about the school. How surprised and delighted I was when I received a letter from Helen Keller in August 1943 (Attachment Thirteen). As you can see from her letter, to Helen Keller it made no difference that I was Japanese, or that the United States was at war with Japan, or that I was deaf while others were not deaf; the human qualities which all people share greatly outweighs our differences. Helen Keller was our only friend, it sometimes seems.

The experience of myself and other deaf children of Japanese ancestry during World War Two is an example of what happens when people forget the truth which Helen Keller states in her letter. I was Japanese and deaf, and I was denied an equal education and other rights because of my differences. The people in WRA forgot that we were all human beings as well.

I think monetary reparations should be paid to all hearing-impaired Nisei who suffered through the evacuation experience. There should be a public apology for the denial of an equal education to deaf children during World War Two.

Date:

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