

TO: Senate Committee on Human Services and Early Childhood

FR: CM Hall, Western Region Interpreter Education Center

DA: March 26, 2015

RE: Support for SB 449

Good afternoon, Chair and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill 449. My name is CM Hall. I coordinate the Western Region Interpreter Education Center at Western Oregon University, I teach courses on DeafBlind interpreting and I have been a sign language interpreter here in Oregon for 22 years. I also serve on our national interpreter board, the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, and on the Oregon DeafBlind Task Force and the Oregon Deaf and Hard of Hearing Advisory Committee. We strongly urge passage of Senate Bill 449.

SB 449 would create an Office for Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing Services in Oregon. It acknowledges the need for critical services. We currently have a state agency that services blind and low vision Oregonians through the Oregon Commission for the Blind, however we do not have that same access point to serve Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing Oregonians, who also experience stark economic, social, and educational inequities.

According to research provided by the Community Needs Assessment Committee, there are over 186,000 Oregonians with hearing loss. As an interpreter, I work with a large number of these individuals who are sign language users. Presently in Oregon, there are only 192 certified interpreters in Oregon, which means that many Deaf and DeafBlind individuals may be going without access to communication when needed. This can make it more challenging to access vocational training, rehabilitation counseling and mental health services, alcohol and drug treatment, or meaningful employment.

There is another unspoken and intangible impact of passing this bill. That is addressing a social prejudice. All too often, hearing individuals fixate on a Deaf, DeafBlind or Hard of Hearing person's so-called "brokenness" or their hearing "impairment." This behavior and belief is called audism. This may be a new term to you. Audism is the notion that one is superior based on one's ability to hear or that those who cannot are inferior and inept because of their audiological status; it's a belief that life without hearing is futile and miserable, or an attitude based

on pathological thinking which results in a negative stigma toward anyone who does not hear. I would doubt that folks who are testifying today feel sorry for themselves because they are Deaf or DeafBlind or Hard of Hearing. But because so many hearing people do, it unfairly disenfranchises Deaf folks and limits their access and opportunities. We need bold leadership to fix this system, to break down barriers and combat prejudice that Deaf people can't do things just because they can't hear. Having an Office dedicated to providing services and training would repair this.

SB449 honors the dignity and worth of all our citizens, regardless of their hearing status and values Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing Oregonians. On behalf of interpreters in these communities, we fully **support SB 449 in its entirety and we urge the Committee to move it forward.**