

Testimony Concerning SB 772

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Salem, Oregon

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Co-Chairs Senator Steiner Hayward and Representative Smith, and the Members of the Subcommittee on General Government:

My name is Steven M. Brown, and I live in Southeast Portland. I have been profoundly deaf since I was five months old as a long-term complication resulting from spinal meningitis. As former Chair of the Legislation Committee of the Oregon Association of the Deaf (OAD,) I am here to represent our organization as a whole by testifying in the strongest possible terms in support of SB 772.

I wish to express my deepest and sincerest thanks to Senator Sara Gelser, Chair of the Senate Human Services and Early Childhood committee, for her generous support of closed captioning, in recognition of making equal access to information freely available to the public. Because of Senator Gelser's extraordinary efforts, public participators are now considered no different in status than those who use audio from televisions. We are very proud to support this particular legislation.

Permit me to share briefly about SB 772, and why it is important to have closed captioning available for the public in all Oregon State Legislature buildings. As you may be aware, there is no closed captioning available anywhere in this very beautiful state capitol building, even for the televisions in lawmakers' offices which broadcast regular sessions and committee hearings. There are hearing-assistance devices available in the Senate and House chambers, but no televisions displayed with closed captioning.

I would like to propose, if possible, that televisions with closed captioning be made available in the chambers. I also propose that we extend the availability of televisions with closed captioning to specific areas in the State capitol building where constituents, lawyers, lobbyists, the public, and even lawmakers can watch anytime and anywhere. As well, please consider the requirement that closed captioning be turned on and remain on at all times.

Even today, more senior citizens are experiencing hearing loss due to general aging or specific health problems. People who are deaf, deaf-blind, hard of hearing, or have lost their hearing abilities for various reasons, need access to closed captioning. This will avoid any barrier to understanding the information being disseminated over said televisions, and truly ‘inform the majority’ in a way that Jefferson perhaps never foresaw, but Benjamin Franklin (who developed hearing loss in his later years) would have approved of wholeheartedly.

All populations need equal access to information. My great colleague David S. Viers said, to wit, “I want the general public to know that captioning is a godsend.” In particular, SB 772 would establish a new Oregon law that requires all televisions in public places to have captioning on at all times. Indeed, this is an ADA accommodation, which makes it paramount (particularly in the areas of Title II and III.)

In addition to the benefits this will provide its targeted population, I also urge you to support this outstanding effort, based on numerous, aggregated findings that:

- **People can't always hear the TV in any venue.**
- **Everyone understands important information in noisy areas when the captioning is On.**
- **People enjoy television even if the sound is turned off or on mute.**
- **Open access to captioning would also increase comprehension for people using English as a second language.**
- **Open access to captioning would boost citizen interest in political process.**

As I touched on just before, mandatory open access to captioning in these areas would be in compliance with ADA Title II and III. I trust that this committee, as well as the Oregon State Legislature as a whole, understands the importance of this work in removing barriers to participation for Oregonians with disabilities.

In its furtherance, we will also enrich and promote equality for all Oregonians to enjoy and participate in public facilities, programs, services, and activities. We look forward to continuing this work with the Oregon State Legislature and others as our work moves ahead.

Respectfully submitted,



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