

March 29, 2017

Senator Sara Gelser, Chair
Senate Committee on Human Services
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Senator Gelser, and the Members of the Senate Committee on Human Services,

I support the passage of Senate Bill 1023. The State of Oregon suffers from a chronic need for provision of access to communication, advocacy, and educational and employment services to Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing individuals. These services would make the lives of this population functionally equivalent to that of the rest of Oregon's citizens. Currently Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing individuals are disadvantaged by structural barriers that SB 1023 would begin to remove.

The fund is critical for the program to be sustained. Fund must be reliable and a very strong mechanism for the existed program to run. Indeed, creating a new account of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Fund for the Department of Human Services (DHS) will help to maintain existed program and to expand current operations with new services in a long run.

I believe SB 1023 is a right thing to do, and is a common-sense bill because since 1987, Public Utilities Commission (PUC) has operated telecommunication programs very strong and with no sustained economic losses. PUC is a trustworthy agency where a second account to be created can be trusted, funding existed Deaf and Hard of Hearing program under the DHS in a long run.

However, I understand that the amendments are possible. I trust Senator Laurie Monnes Anderson that the amendments may be necessary because of possible oppositions by Citizen Utility Board (CUB) and Oregon Telecommunication Association (OTA). She proposes that a study group be created so that the issues can be studied further. I support that amendment, as well.

Supporting SB 1023 is an opportunity for Oregon's leadership to empower Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing by granting access to the functionally equivalent services that they deserve.

Sincerely,

Steven M Brown, MPA, MA
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cc: Oregon Association of the Deaf, Inc.
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