



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,

This is not our first attempt to get our legislature's attention on the needs of Oregonians who are Deaf, Deaf-Blind, Hard of Hearing and with any additional disabilities. We first attempted this during the 2015 legislative session with SB 449a. This bill did not survive however the DHS was given an additional \$200,000 to do a community needs assessment.

Western Oregon University conducted the community needs assessment, and recently released their report on December 31, 2016. This report demonstrates a severe need for services pertaining to this community that includes but is not limited to; effective communication, CART and interpreter referral services, advocacy, early intervention, healthcare, emergency services, education, vocational training, employment, public transportation, communication technologies, and to educate state and local government agencies and businesses to make their spaces accessible.

According to the most recent United States Census, nearly one in twenty Oregonians have hearing loss of varying degrees. That is approximately 186,117 people which is a number larger than the entire population of Eugene, Oregon yet we do not have a statewide government office that works directly with individuals who are Deaf, Deaf-Blind, Hard of Hearing and those with any additional disabilities.

For this to succeed in Oregon, such an agency must be staffed by human service professionals with expertise in issues relating to the Deaf, DeafBlind, Hard of Hearing and those with any additional disabilities. The population they will serve includes a substantial linguistic minority community that communicates in American Sign Language. The employees must be fluent in this language. There should be 11 full-time employees and 2 part-time employees. Those numbers are the average among the states in the 2009 report.

Beside the needs for this team of employees to operate efficiently, the Office of the Deaf, Deaf-Blind, and Hard of Hearing Services (ODDBHHS) program needs to have their in-house Effective Communication, CART and Interpreter Referral Services as known as Sign Language Interpreter Services to remain within the Department of Human Services's ODDBHHS program.

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The State needs to maintain its program for local and state government as a part of the road map. This will eventually include the ability to process complaints on interpreters, video remote interpreting and interpreter service providers, interpreter state licensure, establish guideline to monitor qualified and certified interpreters, and maintain the policies that affect sign language interpreters and those using the accommodations.

The Office will need to be able to propose and advocate legislation and function as a liaison between the population it serves and the legislature. Otherwise, the Office will struggle to implement and operate the programs and services efficiently. Operating its programs will require assistance from the legislature and partnership with the Department of Human Services. There will be a lot of work ahead after the office opens its doors to the public. I respectfully request advocacy and consultation powers be granted to this new office.

Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing people need an advocate in the State of Oregon. We need a team that knows the people it serves and the language they use, a team that can teach businesses and government about existing laws that protect us and can help make our future brighter. Until we have such an advocate, there will continue to be Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing people who are unable to get access to necessary human services, like the woman I met at the festival, or the elderly couple homeless on the streets. Space prevents me from sharing the overwhelming number of tragic stories I've heard from people like them, but there are many more.

Please support Senate Bill 1018!

Sincerely,

Chad A. Ludwig, MSW, ADAC
President
Oregon Association of the Deaf, Inc.

Founded in 1921 and with more than 260 members, OAD's mission is to promote, protect and preserve the civil rights for more than 186,000 Oregonians who are Deaf, DeafBlind, Hard of Hearing, and those with an additional disability. Visit www.OAD1921.org and [www.fb.com/DeafOregon](https://www.facebook.com/DeafOregon).

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