

Senate Bill 1018 and SB 1023

Testimony by

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I am testifying on behalf of Senate Bills 1018 and 1023 - primarily SB 1018, as SB 1023 appears to be a financing mechanism for SB 1018. I support these bills with some reservations.

First, a bit about myself. I wore hearing aids for more than 30 years when I made the decision to get bilateral Cochlear Implants. I am currently completely audiologicaly deaf, but identify as Hard of Hearing.

I have been working with People (or Persons) with Hearing Loss (PwHL) - both Deaf and Hard of Hearing - for more than 30 years, either in a volunteer capacity or professionally; I have a Master's degree in Rehabilitation Counseling: Deafness (RCD) and have worked at three different non-profits focused on hearing loss. By the way, I prefer the term PwHL when discussing this population because it covers the entire gamut and avoids the Deaf versus Hard of Hearing issues that sometimes show up.

I have created a chart in my written testimony in which I attempt to specify what parts of the bill I have concerns with, and why. But to briefly cover these points:

First, how does a Committee of people with no apparent expertise, aside from having a particular disability, professionally "administer" a Program? At most, such a representative group of people with hearing loss should be advising the staff of this new program.

Secondly, this Committee has only 1/3 of its membership designated as "hard of hearing" - but the reality is that, of the overall population we are looking at, well over 95% falls into this category. There have been issues in the past of "tunnel vision" occurring where all of the problems/solutions of an issue are viewed through the prism of one aspect of a particular disability. Because, while Deaf and Hard of Hearing face a common problem (i.e. hearing loss), the solutions on how to overcome the communication barriers facing us are very different.

The focus in this bill on sign language interpreters, with no mention of Captioning, Assistive Listening Devices, or other accommodations, is a prime example of this.

Finally, a huge focus of this Program seems to be on conducting studies. We already know from the numerous published studies already done - and confirmed by the Community Needs Assessment just conducted by Western Oregon University - that people with hearing loss face a number of challenges. It would seem to me that the focus should be on providing relief to this population through direct services - i.e. via specialists that can educate people in technology, coping skills, communication strategies, what is known as "information and referral", etc.

Thank you for your attention.

Respectfully submitted,

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<p>Section 2. (3) Of the members appointed under subsection (2) of this section: (a) Three must be, or must represent, individuals who are deaf; (b) Three must be, or must represent, individuals who are deaf-blind; and (c) Three must be, or must represent, individuals who are hard of hearing.</p>	<p>People classified as "hard of hearing" make up well over 95% of the population of those who have hearing loss. I am concerned that this group will only have a 1/3 representation on this Committee.</p>
<p>Section 2. (4) The committee shall administer the Oregon Deaf, Deaf-Blind and Hard of Hearing Program established under section 3 of this 2017 Act.</p>	<p>How does a Committee of people with no apparent expertise, aside from having a particular disability, professionally "administer" a Program? At most, such a representative group of people with hearing loss should be advising the staff of this new program.</p>
<p>SECTION 3. The Oregon Deaf, Deaf-Blind and Hard of Hearing Program is established in the Department of Human Services. The Oregon Deaf, Deaf-Blind and Hard of Hearing Committee established under section 2 of this 2017 Act shall administer the program. As part of the program, the committee shall:</p>	<p>How does a Committee of people with no apparent expertise, aside from having a particular disability, professionally "administer" a Program? (same comment as above for Section 2 (4).</p>
<p>SECTION 3. (1) Collect, and create a database for, facts, statistics and studies related to individuals who are deaf, deaf-blind or hard of hearing. (2) Review and conduct studies related to the following: (3) Act as a bureau of information with respect to facts, statistics and studies collected under subsection (1) of this section and studies conducted under subsection (2) of this section for:</p>	<p>A huge focus of this Program seems to be on conducting studies. We already know from the numerous published studies already done - and confirmed by the CNA just conducted by WOU - that people with hearing loss face a number of challenges. It would seem to me that the focus should be on providing relief to this population through direct services - i.e. via specialists that can educate people in technology, coping skills, communication strategies, what is known as "information and referral", etc.</p>
<p>SECTION 3. (5) Establish, maintain and coordinate a statewide sign language interpreter referral service that may be used by any public or private entity or individual.</p>	<p>The talk of sign language interpreters, with no mention of Captioning, Assistive Listening Devices, or other accommodations, is a concern and an example of what I see as too narrow a focus of this bill.</p>