

April 17, 2017

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Good Afternoon Chair Doherty and Members of the House Education Committee,

As a member of the Oregon AG Bell Chapter and teacher of the deaf at Tucker Maxon School, I am here in support of HB 3412; however, we have some suggestions regarding changes we would like to see. Tucker Maxon School is a private non-profit school in Portland, OR that teaches children who are deaf and hard of hearing and children with typical hearing to listen, talk, and achieve excellence together. The children at our school use spoken language to communicate.

We agree that assessment of outcomes of intervention and tracking the progress of children with disabilities, is a worthwhile endeavor. This effort should be standardized, to capitalize on the on-going work of early identification of hearing loss. We know whether children are enrolled in early intervention (EI), early childhood special education (ECSE), or special education, but we do not have a standardized way of measuring adequate progress across the state. That is why this bill is important.

At Tucker Maxon, we evaluate our children (birth-3) at least every 6 months and our children (ages 3-12) annually using standardized norm-referenced and criterion-referenced assessments. Knowledge of the child's development helps us, in partnership with the child's family as well as educational and medical teams, identify whether additional strategies and supports are needed to increase the child's skills. We track the results of our students in a database that allows us to evaluate the effectiveness of our programming over time and therefore, we are excited that this bill would encourage programs across the state to do this as well.

After reviewing the bill, we are concerned that the nine members currently identified for the task force are too narrow in scope for the goals of this team. Therefore, we have suggested changes to the task force. We would like to see the addition of an early intervention provider who works specifically with children using spoken language only as this would be consistent with other representation categories. The inclusion of an audiologist is paramount as the assessment of the cognitive, language, and speech skills of children who access auditory information cannot be interpreted accurately without information regarding their hearing thresholds and speech perception abilities. This representative on the board is necessary to help create procedures and methods for evaluating hearing levels as well as device settings in a standardized way. We also feel that a representative, like a psychologist, with expertise in the assessment of cognitive function of children, particularly children with hearing loss, is needed as it is not in the scope of practice of the other professionals listed in the bill to interpret cognitive testing.

A representative of the EBDI program would be an important member as well, as they have a wealth of data already collected regarding children with hearing loss and so it would be practical to collaborate. Finally, a representative from regional program services would be beneficial, as this is where all public services for children who are deaf or hard of hearing are currently provided. Therefore, these would be the programs who would likely be administering the assessments the task force selects.

We also have concerns regarding the vagueness of the qualifications listed for the members of the task force. For example, for the parent representatives to the board, is the communication mode listed applicable to the child, the parent, or both? Is the age of their child relevant given the task force's focus on birth to age 8? For the Educators on the board, would they be required to currently be practicing/licensed? Is the age range that they teach relevant given the task force's focus on birth to age 8? The superintendent of public instruction is slated to appoint all members of this board. How will this process happen and how will the qualifications of the individuals be evaluated? Finally, should there be guidelines that the representatives on this board represent the various public and private agencies that serve children who are deaf and hard of hearing all throughout the state so that there is diversity in thought?

At Tucker Maxon, we strive to be leaders in the state with regards to the listening and spoken language instruction for children who are deaf and hard of hearing. We may be in support of the general aims of this legislation with the mentioned changes, and hope to be involved in helping to improve this bill and making it a reality.

Thank you for your time.