

My name is Elizabeth Shuler-Krause and I support bill 3412, as an Early Intervention/Early Childhood Teacher of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, and as a hard of hearing individual.

I'm bilingual. I have a Bachelor's degree in English and two Master's degrees: one in Special Education and one in Deaf Education and I'm pursuing PhD programs. I've beat the odds. I am a mother of two beautiful and precocious hearing children. I am a strong, confident, and successful hard of hearing woman. I am who I am today because I had early, consistent, and rich exposure to language, both at home and in the educational system.

Over the past 7 years I've worked to serve Deaf and Hard of Hearing children and their families in the Portland area. Always working toward the same goal: providing children with the early, consistent and rich language exposure that I was lucky enough to experience as a child.

For the first 4 years of my teaching career, I taught a bilingual preschool program for Deaf and Hard of Hearing children. I was constantly surprised by how little language the children had when they entered my classroom. I had three year old children entering my classroom with vocabularies of under 25 words. I had three year old children entering my classroom with annual IFSP goals to increase their vocabulary from 10 words/signs to 50 words/signs by the end of the year. I had three year old children entering my classroom who didn't even know their own names. Despite my best efforts, closing the gap and ensuring that these kids are ready for kindergarten is nearly impossible. This is not good enough!!

Even more shocking, is the percentage of these children who had received Early Intervention services for at least a year prior to entering my classroom. Almost all of them. So, I started to wonder how these kids who had received early intervention could have so little language at 3 years old. I decided to change positions and work with the birth to 3 population so I could dig deeper at this question.

There are so many reasons that Deaf and Hard of Hearing children in Oregon struggle with language acquisition. And there is no question that they struggle. Data from the 2016 Kindergarten readiness assessment confirms that Deaf and Hard of Hearing children in every region across Oregon are not prepared for Kindergarten when compared to their peers. Right now we have a system that supports continuing with an approach, with the intervention plan that is in place, even when it's not working for the child. Instead of frequently and appropriately monitoring progress through appropriate assessment and adapting our service plans accordingly, we are doubling down on the approach that isn't working, and our Deaf and Hard of Hearing children are missing language opportunity during the critical window for language development.

Our current system only requires formal language assessment at the time the child enters Early Intervention and at the transition to ECSE at 3 years old. That's only two formal assessments of the child's language skills in their first five years of life. This isn't frequent enough. These sparse

assessments are often done by teachers who have no training in assessing Deaf children, using tools that are not normed for Deaf children. Assessment is often conducted only in English, even though the child may be using American Sign Language to communicate. Parents are often not provided with information about how their child's language development compares to typical children's language development following the assessment. In some places assessments are happening on the same day as the child's education plan is being written, giving parents no time to process the results of the assessment before agreeing to a service plan. The services provided to the child are not always a direct result of an appropriate language assessment and vary in quality, quantity and consistency across different regions of Oregon and even between different providers within the same regional program. The result is an inequitable system of services for children who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing across the state of Oregon. The result is Deaf and Hard of Hearing children who are not ready for Kindergarten. This is not good enough.

That's why I have worked on and support this legislation. This bill establishes a diverse, multidisciplinary task force to gather data and create a framework to address the issues previously mentioned. The task force will provide a framework that requires teachers working with Deaf and Hard of Hearing infants, toddlers, and young children to formally assess their language development more frequently, to use appropriate assessment tools, to provide parents with information about how their child's development compares to their peers, and requires the IFSP team to discuss and make changes to the language plan if the child is not making adequate progress. This increases accountability for those providing services and requires them to prove the child is making adequate progress through formal assessment. This increases equity of services across different providers and regions and will help ensure that our Deaf and Hard of Hearing children are linguistically ready for kindergarten.

As an Early Childhood Teacher of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, I believe this bill will go a long way in ensuring that Deaf and Hard of Hearing children across Oregon have access to services that will allow them to develop language and be ready for Kindergarten. As a hard of hearing individual, I ask you to please support Bill 3412 so that education for our Deaf children will not only be good enough, but so that they can have the early, consistent, and rich exposure to language that I was fortunate enough to have.

Thank you!

Elizabeth Shuler-Krause, M.S., M.A.
Early Intervention/Early Childhood
Teacher of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing