

April 26, 2017

Testimony supporting HB 3160  
Before the Senate Human Services Committee

Former Representative Jean Cowan

Ruthanne Lidman

Chair Gelser and respected members of the committee:

Thank you for hearing us. I am Jean Cowan (2710 NE Iler, Newport, OR) and a former Representative of House District 10. With me today is my good friend and long-time colleague, Ruthanne Lidman, who you will hear from shortly.

We offer our thanks to Rep. Doherty and Piluso for their assistance in bringing HB 3160 forward. When Ruthanne's eyesight began to fail dramatically, she found herself in need of a white cane for assistance with independence and mobility. Unfortunately, her research of Oregon Law quickly showed us that her vision had not yet reached the 20/200 threshold to be considered legally "blind" and, thereby, eligible to use such an assistance device. Instead, her vision tests out at 20/160, with both eyes.

The changes to ORS 811.035, 814.110 and 814.120 presented in HB 3160, merely add another category to those who can reap the benefits of using a white cane to individuals with "limited vision," along with those who meet the standard of being "blind." It is, simply, a safety measure to assist drivers in recognizing pedestrians who have significant visual impairments. With the increased use of electric vehicles, which cannot be detected by sound, this is an ever-increasing necessity. The -1-amendment updated language when referencing the Deaf-Blind community and was added at the request of the Oregon Association of the Deaf.

Ruthanne is far from unique - many, many individuals are coping with the condition, Macular Degeneration or other vision-robbing health issues. She will share with you the comments from her retina specialist reinforcing this point. As she will also help you understand, maintaining one's independence and mobility becomes a big challenge when you can no longer drive and navigating on foot is hampered by a visual impairment.

HB 3160 is just one small, easy step towards making life just a bit easier. After its unanimous approval in the House, I urge its prompt passage into law.