



From the desk of Chad A. Ludwig

March 18, 2019

Senator Laurie Monnes Anderson, Chair
Senate Committee on Health Care
900 Court St. NE, S-211
Salem, OR 97301

RE: Senate Bill 795

To the Senate Committee on Health Care,

My name is Chad A. Ludwig, and I am writing this letter as a private citizen. I want to disclose that I also work as Interim Director of the Regional Resource Center on Deafness at Western Oregon University and as Executive Director for Bridges Oregon, Inc., an unpaid position. I am involved in multiple activities in the community, such as the Legislative Committee at the Oregon Association of the Deaf and numerous other advisory committees, work groups, and projects. This letter is my personal testimony.

I regret I am unable to be present during the public hearing and possible work session hearing, since I need to be at work today.

Please support SB 795!

Over fifteen years ago, the Oregon Department of Human Services reduced the number of staff positions at Oregon Deaf and Hard of Hearing Service (ODHHS) from seven to one, undermining the effectiveness of ODHHS. The sole remaining employee was responsible for coordinating all accommodation services across the state. This change disheartened the DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing members of the committee, who later left their positions vacant. The committee remained inactive for the next ten years. In 2013, I moved to Oregon and organized a community effort to revitalize the ODHHS Advisory Committee. In 2015, I worked with the legislature to fund a Community-Based Needs Assessment (CNA), which was conducted and subsequently submitted to the legislature in 2017. The report is available online at www.wou.edu/rrcd/cna/.

In spring of 2017, Oregon DHS created a Deaf and Hard of Hearing Specialist position. In January 2018, a lawsuit alleging hiring discrimination led to the creation of a duplicate position. Several months later, the Oregon DHS added two more positions. The program now has a team of 4 people providing excellent service to



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the Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing community.

The ODHHS program provides a vital service, including but not limited to ensuring that state agencies and departments are able to comply with federal accommodations law by fulfilling accommodations requests. With the additional positions, ODHHS is now more effective than it is in the past. It remains vulnerable to staffing changes, however, because it is not a state-mandated program.

According to the United States Census, nearly one in twenty Oregonians have some degree of hearing loss. That's about 186,117, a number larger than the entire population of Eugene, Oregon. Yet we do not have a permanent statewide government office that works directly with individuals who are Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing.

Other states do, like our neighbor, Washington. There are 38 states with agencies that provide permanent human services to Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing people. We need a permanent office with expertise in Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing that would be able to consult and collaborate with all state agencies, private and public entities to ensure that the effective policies and procedures on communication access are in place. The office would ensure the rights of Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing are protected in all areas including education, health care, employment, and public accommodations, and would promote public awareness about the prevention and safety of hearing loss, all coming from the state level.

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 protects 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.

This population deserves to be active and equal members in society. Other states already have permanent offices that work for our welfare. I urge you to establish a permanent office in Oregon by voting a do-pass recommendation on SB 795.

Sincerely,



Chad A. Ludwig, MSW, ADAC, DI