

I'm writing today to ask for your support and consideration for SB795.

I am a lifelong Oregonian, studied to become a sign language interpreter here in Oregon at Western Oregon University, and am nationally-certified as an interpreter and I am also a co-director of a federal interpreter training grant that was awarded to Western Oregon University.

I am writing in support of this bill.

Oregon used to have a bustling Deaf & Hard of Hearing Services agency. And then budgets were cut and the agency went away. Sadly, it sent a message about Oregon's value of our Deaf and DeafBlind citizens.

Now again, Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing folks are showing up, lobbying their representatives and senators. It's telling that there are so many impassioned folks who care about services, and I hope you are seeing the strength and vibrance of these communities and yet, I suspect that they are still woefully underrepresented because it's hard to track Deaf and DeafBlind folks who've been made to feel invisible because of a lack of investment in services by the state.

The Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing communities need and deserve official designation and services through DHS if they aren't able to have their own agency (like the Oregon Commission for the Blind). We, as hearing allies of the Deaf/DeafBlind/Hard of Hearing communities also crave this representation, validation, and services. It's embarrassing that we do not have services for these communities in a state that works to ensure other types of economic and racial justice; Deaf folks do not yet have linguistic justice and access.

There are some great things happening here in Oregon in the Deaf and DeafBlind communities and we are so lucky that some of their community leaders are calling our state home. Please give legitimacy to their residency by supporting them with critical services.

Thank you for your consideration.

CM Hall, Newport, OR