



# Oregon

Kate Brown, Governor

Department of Transportation

Director's Office

355 Capitol St. NE, MS 11

Salem, OR 97301

**DATE:** March 4, 2021

**TO:** Joint Committee on Transportation

**FROM:** Lindsay Baker, Assistant Director

**SUBJECT:** House Bill 2498 – Deaf/Hard of Hearing Indicators on Vehicle Registration & Driver Licenses

## INTRODUCTION

House Bill 2498, with the (-1) amendment, would allow an individual to indicate on an application for vehicle registration or driver license, that they are deaf or hard of hearing. ODOT understands that the intent behind this measure is to allow law enforcement to gain access to this information before they come in contact with a person who is deaf or hard of hearing, in order to give law enforcement the ability to adjust as necessary to communicate effectively with the individual.

## DISCUSSION

House Bill 2498, with the (-1) amendment, would alter the application for vehicle registration and driver licenses, to include an option for an individual to indicate that they are deaf or hard of hearing. The measure would also require that ODOT use an indicator (a letter or symbol) on driver licenses to indicate a person's deaf or hard of hearing status.

ODOT understands the intent behind the measure is to provide law enforcement with this information before they come in contact with an individual who is deaf or hard of hearing, to allow law enforcement to make necessary adjustments in order to better communicate with the individual.

If passed, ODOT would undertake two pieces of implementation. First, the application for vehicle registration will be updated to allow an individual to indicate that they, or someone who operates the vehicle, is deaf or hard of hearing. This change will result in this deaf/hard of hearing indicator to appear on both the vehicle record, *and* the physical registration card that an individual carries with them. This change will allow law enforcement, when checking vehicle records, to see this indicator *before* they make contact with the individual during a traffic stop.

Second, the (-1) amendment would require ODOT to add to its driver license application, an option for the individual to indicate that they are deaf or hard of hearing, and would require this indicator be added to the individual's driver license. This deaf/hard of hearing status would be indicated on the physical driver license by a letter, symbol, or other marker. This change will allow an individual to present their driver license to law enforcement, to indicate that they are deaf or hard of hearing. It's likely that this driver license indicator would not provide this deaf/hard of hearing information to law enforcement *before* an interaction is made.

Finally, it is worth noting that the measure does not require ODOT-DMV to take any action to verify that a person is deaf or hard of hearing, and does not require the individual to present proof. ODOT-DMV envisions this as solely a self-certifying process.

ODOT would also raise, for the committee's consideration, expanding the measure to include not only those that are deaf or hard of hearing, but those that have *any* medical condition that may impede their ability to communicate with law enforcement. ODOT understands that the need this bill attempts to address may be experienced by a wider range of individuals, with varied medical conditions and communication challenges. Expanding the measure would allow ODOT-DMV to offer this critical service to a wider swath of Oregonians, and make better use of limited space on driver licenses where an indicator can be placed. This expansion can be accomplished in future legislative sessions.

### **SUMMARY**

House Bill 2498, with the (-1) amendment, would require ODOT-DMV to offer the ability for an individual to declare on their vehicle registration and driver license that they are deaf or hard of hearing. This indicator would be added to the vehicle record (accessible by law enforcement), the physical registration card, and a person's driver license. ODOT understands the intent of the measure is to help provide this critical information to law enforcement *before* they come in contact with an individual, to help facilitate communication. ODOT offers for the committee's consideration, expanding the measure to include medical conditions generally, that may pose communication challenges between individuals and law enforcement.