



To: Joint Ways & Means Education Sub-Committee  
From: Doug Thompson, Oregon Lions Sight & Hearing Foundation  
Re: SB 5513 – ODE School Vision Screening Funding  
Date: March 31, 2021

Chairs Frederick and McLain, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to advocate for an extremely effective and cost efficient tool for helping Oregon students succeed in the classroom: vision health screening utilizing objective screening devices.

Public funding for school vision screening in Oregon schools was approved by the Oregon Legislature in 2017, with bipartisan, unanimous support and with the understanding that too many Oregon students struggle in the classroom simply because they can't see what is being presented to them.

Your support of SB 5513 will enable the Oregon Department of Education to continue to support Oregon public schools in the effort to identify students not seeing – and learning – to their full potential. This \$2 million grant-in-aid line item provides a reimbursement of \$3.20 per student for a highly accurate vision health screening which can identify up to 11 different vision health issues. The market or "retail" value of such a screening is nearly 10 times this amount, so rest assured public dollars are being spent responsibly.

Even more importantly, the quality of vision screening in Oregon schools that SB 5513 will sustain cannot be understated. Using computerized technology, these vision screenings are referring students for the comprehensive eye exams that can put them in a pair of new eyeglasses and on track towards academic success.

Studies show that students not reading at grade level are 13 times less likely to graduate from High School as those that read at grade level. Often the only reason that a child doesn't read well is due to the fact that they simply cannot see the words on the page as well as their friends sitting in the desks next to them. We hear from school nurses, teachers -- and especially parents -- that once a student has their new eyeglasses the world has literally changed for them – in fact you'll hear examples of this shortly.

Anecdotal feedback is great but the reality is there is also data-based evidence that supports the impact of objective based vision screening in Oregon schools: We have provided written testimony from Dr. J.P. Lowery of Pacific University's Optometry School. Dr. Lowery has nearly completed a study of Salem-Keizer School District 3<sup>rd</sup> graders, utilizing vision screening results from our screening events at all 40+ elementary schools in the Salem-Keizer School District. With permission from Salem-Keizer 24J, Dr. Lowery was able analyze standardized test scores and has identified that students referred as needing comprehensive eye exams scored 10 points lower on Math and English tests than their counterparts that were not referred as needing an eye exam.

Passage of SB 5513 will ensure that more students will be identified as needing comprehensive eye exams, helping more children succeed academically and, ultimately, helping Oregon improve our high school graduation rate.

We are pleased to advocate for such worthy legislation and we very much appreciate that the importance of children's vision health – and its connection to academic success – is embraced by legislators on both sides of the aisle.

Thank you for your consideration.