

Submitter: Steven Carter
On Behalf Of: Tucker Maxon School
Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means
Measure: SB5506

I am writing today to show strong support for SB5506, as it would allow for the passage of HB2994A, legislation that will ensure deaf and hard-of-hearing kids across the state get the critical healthcare services they need.

In 2018, the legislature passed HB 4104 which required insurers to cover hearing aids, cochlear implants, and certain assistive listening devices for children to reduce barriers in school and life for those with hearing loss.

Without consistent, clear access to sound, children often fall behind in spoken language acquisition, literacy, academics, and important social skills. Early interventions and access to hearing aids, cochlear implants, and assistive listening devices are incredibly important for a child's development. HB 4104 passed almost unanimously through the legislature, showing strong bipartisan support for such a policy to ensure the well-being of our youngest residents. It set a national model of care for how the state, in partnership with insurers, can support Oregonians who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Since the passage of HB 4104, several issues have cropped up in the implementation process, barring children with hearing loss from being able to access these critical services, and forcing families to pay out-of-pocket costs for less medically appropriate alternatives. HB 2994A will clarify and expand insurance coverage of hearing aids, cochlear implants, and assistive listening devices for deaf and hard-of-hearing children across the state and ensure the promise the state made to our children in 2018 is properly implemented. This bill passed the House Behavioral Health & Health Care Committee with unanimous support and has a bipartisan group of co-chief and regular sponsors.

I work as a pediatric audiologist at Tucker Maxon School in Portland, Oregon. Prior to working here, I was an educational audiologist at Willamette ESD serving students in Marion and Yamhill counties. I deal directly with insurances and can attest to the difficulties involved with obtaining approval and proper compensation for hearing devices, accessories, and testing procedures. It is crucial for children learning via spoken language to have properly fit devices at all times. Unfortunately, some insurances make this very difficult, leaving professionals like me spending more time trying to get the things I need covered and less time working directly with the patients that need me. This bill would do a great job about closing gaps, which would allow me to more properly provide care for my patients and free up time that I would be dealing with insurance billing issues to work with more patients.

The state has an opportunity to invest in the future of our children. That is why I am urging you to fund HB 2994A this session and keep the promise the legislature made to our deaf and hard-of-hearing children five years ago.

Sincerely,
Steven Carter
Pediatric Audiologist, Tucker Maxon School