

To: Joint Committee on Ways & Means

Subject: Support & Fund HB 2994A

Dear Co-Chair Steiner, Co-Chair Sanchez and Members of the Joint Committee On Ways and Means,

I am writing today to share my strong support of HB 2994A, a bill that will ensure deaf and hard-of-hearing kids across the state get the critical healthcare services they need to thrive.

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.

HB 4104 made it possible for my child to receive insurance coverage for his hearing aids and assistive listening devices for his bi-lateral moderate to severe hearing loss. Without the passing of that legislation, our family would have had a very difficult time affording quality hearing aids, which cost thousands of dollars. My child has benefited greatly from the access created by HB 4104 and is now on-track to graduate public high school thanks to hearing loss intervention and support accessed both through our insurance and the school district.

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. I strongly believe that all families with hearing impaired children deserve the opportunity to receive the most medically-appropriate services and amplification at an affordable cost.

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.

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.

Respectfully,

Karrisa Peters
Grants Pass, OR