

February 16, 2025

Dear Members of the Oregon Legislature,

I am writing to express my strong support for HB 2448, which I believe will greatly benefit my child and countless other children in Oregon who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH) or receive special education services. I am writing to you as the mother of Rhys Lyddane, an incredible 2.5 year-old born with bilateral sensorineural hearing loss, and the first Deaf person in our family. I have experienced firsthand the challenges that come with accessing appropriate resources, services, and support for my child's language development. Every day, I witness Rhys's incredible determination to communicate, learn, and connect with the world around him.

However, I also see the gaps in services that make this journey more difficult. Early intervention is key in providing children like mine with the foundation they need for successful language development and future academic achievement. HB 2448 will ensure that DHH children, and other children receiving special education services, have equitable access to the support they need, from qualified professionals who are trained in providing tailored services.

To give Rhys the most access to language, our family is working hard to learn American Sign Language (ASL) and incorporate it into our daily lives. Additionally, Rhys is bilaterally implanted with cochlear implants and is working on his auditory skills and developing his vocabulary. With all of this said, when it comes to communicating complex directions or navigating emotions, Rhys prefers to his first language, American Sign Language. While we do not know what Rhys's educational path will look like exactly, we do know that an ASL interpreter in a mainstream setting could be critical to giving Rhys access to information in the same way as his hearing peers. Stagnant levels of funding are failing our children and our families. School Districts are forced to make poor decisions that are forever impacting our children based on the costs and availability of resources. One on one interpreters are expensive, and we have seen firsthand the impacts of an in-person interpreter being withheld within our DHH family network. Should we decide to send Rhys to the Oregon School for the Deaf, his placement should not be decided based on the finances associated with sending a student to a specialized school. Just because Rhys was born with a disability does not make him any less deserving to have access to an education.

We understand that special education services are expensive. Allowing districts to apply for funds that directly support children with more significant needs means more chances for our children to succeed and be included. The current 40% reimbursement is not adequate. Additive funding is needed to reimburse 100% of the costs associated with these critical, more costly services. This bill is not just about providing access to services; it is about ensuring that my child, and others like him, are not left behind because of systemic barriers. With HB 2448, we can help level the playing field, providing my child with the tools to thrive in an inclusive, supportive environment where he is not left out by their hearing loss.

I am hopeful that this bill will move forward with your support so that children in Oregon can have the opportunity to reach their fullest potential. As a mother, all I want is for Rhys to grow up with the same opportunities for success as any other child. HB 2448 is an essential step in making that a reality.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,  
Kim Lyddane  
Albany, Oregon