February 9, 2015

The Honorable Sara Gelser
Chairwoman before the Senate Committee
    on Health Care and Early Childhood
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Honorable Senator Gelser:

The National Association of the Deaf (NAD) urges you to support and ensure passage of Oregon Senate Bill 449 which would establish an Office for Deaf, Deaf-Blind, and Hard of Hearing within the Oregon Department of Human Services. Established in 1880, the NAD is the oldest national civil rights organization and is the premier entity dedicated to the civil, human, and linguistic rights of deaf and hard of hearing individuals in the United States. The NAD is a federation comprised of state associations of the deaf across the country including the Oregon Association of the Deaf (OAD). The NAD supports the efforts of the OAD to promote passage of this Senate Bill.

Oregon Senate Bill 449 would directly benefit at least 186,000 deaf, deaf-blind, and hard of hearing Oregonians by creating a state level government office authorized to advocate on their behalf. These Oregonians do not need charity; rather, they require government services to ensure equal access to government services, education, employment, professional services, and more. On a national basis, this underserved population faces dismal rates in education, employment and the receipt of services.

More than half of the country has such state offices or commissions dedicated to ensuring services are provided to the deaf, deaf-blind, and hard of hearing population. The current office in Oregon is not authorized to provide direct services but only to serve in an advisory capacity. The time has come for Oregon to ensure all of its citizens are treated equally.

Should you have any questions regarding the position of the NAD on this matter, please do not hesitate to contact us at nad.info@nad.org or 301-587-1788.

Sincerely,

Christopher D. Wagner
President

Howard A. Rosenblum
Chief Executive Officer