

I'm writing today to ask for your support and consideration for HB3206.

I am a lifelong Oregonian and studied to become a sign language interpreter here in Oregon at Western Oregon University. I am a nationally-certified interpreter and I am also co-director of a federal interpreter training grant that trains sign language interpreters across the US to work with folks who are DeafBlind. This multi-million dollar grant was awarded to Western Oregon University.

In 2008, while I was working at Western, I created a service-learning project and an opportunity to train ASL-fluent students at Western to become trusted, sighted guides (Support Service Providers) who then would be matched with DeafBlind adults. SSPs assist DeafBlind folks in maintaining their autonomy, completing tasks like shopping, reading mail, attending community events, etc.

Through the project I started, it has become a full-fledged annual course offering at Western as well as a practicum experience. To date, over 145 Western students have been trained as Support Service Providers through the program at Western that I have been running. After participating in my program, many went on to accept jobs with DeafBlind folks, traveling to conferences, on cruises, and also have accepted paid full-time employment where they've utilized their SSP skills.

I get many requests for volunteer SSPs from DeafBlind folks in Oregon and am unable to match them all because of distance and timing of requests. No one else is doing this work in Oregon to train SSPs and the DeafBlind community is growing here. I'm proud of any role I've played in that growth happening, but having the State's endorsement, acknowledgment, funding, and training for SSPs would help formalize it a lot and would further validate and acknowledge DeafBlind Oregonians who choose to live here.

There are some great things happening here in Oregon in the DeafBlind community and we are so lucky that some of their national community leaders are calling our state home. Please give legitimacy to their residency by supporting them with critical services, like a funded SSP program.

Thank you for your consideration.

CM Hall, Newport, OR