

February 10, 2021

Representative Tawna Sanchez, Chair
House Committee on Behavioral Health Care
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Representative Sanchez, and the Members of the House Committee on Behavioral Health Care,

I support the passage of House Bill 2585. The State of Oregon suffers from a chronic need for provision of access to communication and education to Deaf, Deaf-Blind, and Hard of Hearing Oregonians with mental health needs. These services would make the lives of this population functionally equivalent to that of the rest of Oregon's citizens. Currently Deaf, Deaf-Blind, and Hard of Hearing Oregonians with mental health needs are disadvantaged by structural barriers that HB 2585 would begin to remove.

As a nationally certified American Sign Language Interpreter, I have witnessed first hand how often Deaf individuals struggle to access mental health services that meet their needs. It is particularly challenging to find a provider who provides services in the clients native language and who can provide culturally competent care. I have also seen ineffective and at times culturally harmful encounters between providers and individuals who identify as Deaf or hard of hearing. Practitioners who do not understand Deaf culture and the experience of navigating the world as a Deaf person, make assumptions that deafness is a limitation and barrier as opposed to a cultural identity. Deaf clients often spend much of their sessions educating their mental health providers, forgoing their own ability to receive the support they need.

Supporting HB 2585 is an opportunity for Oregon's leadership to empower Deaf, Deaf-Blind, and Hard of Hearing by granting access to the functionally equivalent mental health services that they deserve.

Sincerely,

Jenna Curtis

11440 SW Lomita Ave, Tigard OR

cc: Oregon Association of the Deaf, Inc.
File