

February 11, 2023

RE: HB 2994

Dear Chair Nosse and members of the House Committee on Behavioral Health and Health Care:

I am writing to you as a retired Teacher of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing and as an individual who is deaf to support HB 2994. Having worn hearing aids since I was three years old, I am very familiar with the financial impact of hearing aids on a family. As an educator I can tell you the impact of hearing aid technology on a child's overall development, especially cognitive and communication development, academic success and their overall success as a contributing, independent member of society.

In 2018, HB 4104 was passed requiring the coverage of hearing aids, cochlear implants and some assistive listening devices for children. While it has helped in many situations, there have been huge loopholes. Limiting the number of earmolds a child can receive in the same calendar year, coverage of hearing aids but not the professional services for programming and fitting, no reimbursement of batteries, chargers, etc. which are viable for working devices, and much more. HB 2994 will fix the issues that have surfaced over the years since HB 4104 was passed.

With Newborn Hearing Screenings at birth, children with hearing loss are being identified very early. My loss was identified at age 3, but just think how much easier it would have been for me if it was identified at 3 weeks! Academics would have been easier, socialization would have been easier, and access to technology would have been easier. In my situation I was fortunate to have a parent who worked with me however had to go into debt to obtain hearing aids for me. In my 45 years of education in the field I have witnessed the overwhelming positive effects of early amplification. Children are graduating with regular diplomas, reading at higher levels, participating in general education classrooms, entering and completing post-secondary or vocational settings all at increased rates than 15+ years ago!

It is critical that children receive the hearing technology that they need to succeed. Without these necessary devices Oregon bears additional costs down the road-- economic, ethical, and those of dependence. Without these devices, children become more dependent on our society, have increased social and emotional difficulties, lower graduation rates, under employment, lower incomes and more. Our children are so worth it. Please ensure the passage of HB 2994.

Sincerely,

Eleni Boston, MS  
Retired Administrator and Teacher of the Deaf/Hard of Hearing