



January 17, 2025

Chair Sen. Kathleen Taylor, Vice-Chair Sen. Daniel Bonham, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Chad A. Ludwig, and I am Founder and Executive Director of Bridges Oregon, Inc. I am writing today in support of Senate Bill 731, which addresses the inclusion of American Sign Language (ASL) in pay differentials for public employees who use bilingual or multilingual skills in their duties.

Bridges Oregon, Inc., is a statewide nonprofit organization dedicated to advocating for and serving the Deaf, DeafBlind, Hard of Hearing, and hearing loss communities in Oregon. Our work includes providing vital services such as sign language assessments, a unique offering in which Bridges Oregon is the only provider in the western United States and one of only four providers nationwide.

While we strongly support SB 731 and its efforts to create fairness in recognizing ASL alongside spoken languages, I must disclose a potential perceived conflict of interest. Bridges Oregon's expertise and role in delivering sign language assessments could be seen as benefiting from increased demand for credentialing and verification of ASL proficiency among public employees seeking the pay differential this bill proposes.

We address this perceived conflict transparently to emphasize that our primary goal remains the promotion of fairness and inclusion for the Deaf and ASL community. Language pay differentials have historically overlooked ASL, despite its critical role in enabling communication access, cultural representation, and ensuring inclusiveness Deaf individuals.

Senate Bill 731 ensures that public employees who are proficient in ASL and use it in their duties receive the same recognition as those proficient in spoken languages. This recognition is long overdue and vital for creating a more balanced and inclusive workforce while removing barriers to employment for ASL users and the Deaf individuals who rely on ASL.

Additionally, by incentivizing ASL proficiency through pay differentials, this bill has the potential to improve communication access for Deaf constituents and enhance the quality of services provided by public institutions. Such policies benefit all Oregonians and affirm the state's commitment to fairness and inclusion for all communities.

In conclusion, Bridges Oregon urges the committee to pass Senate Bill 731 to address the gaps in pay differential policies and promote a more inclusive workforce. We are committed to collaborating with the Legislature and stakeholders to ensure that the bill's implementation aligns with these goals while maintaining transparency about our role in the sign language assessment landscape.

Thank you for considering this testimony. I am available to answer any questions or provide additional information to support your deliberations on SB 731.

Sincerely,

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