

February 11, 2025

Chair Deb Patterson
900 Court St. NE, S-411
Salem, OR 97301

RE: SB 943 Relating to Audiology; Creating New Provisions

Position: Support

Dear Chair Patterson, Vice Chair Hayden, and members of the committee,

I am writing to you as a licensed audiologist and an Oregonian to ask you to support SB 943. This vital legislation will help alleviate strain on our overloaded medical system by allowing audiologists to practice in a way that is consistent with their education and training. Your support of this bill will ensure that every Oregonian has timely access to quality hearing health care.

Audiologists earn a clinical doctorate as the entry-level degree of our profession, receiving extensive education and training in the evaluation, diagnosis, and treatment of hearing, balance disorders and auditory processing disorders. Audiologists provide these vital services for patients across the age spectrum and in every community in Oregon. Along with diagnosing and treating an array of conditions, doctors of audiology are also responsible for triaging patients to physicians and other medical specialists when indicated.

I am a private practice audiologist working in a very busy ENT clinic with a large demographic map that includes much of rural Clackamas County. We routinely see patients that have experienced a sudden sensori-neural hearing loss (SSNHL) in one ear that has been misdiagnosed as “ear fluid” by the primary care and/or urgent care community with ineffective treatment. This treatment will go on for weeks before the patient is finally referred for audiology testing. By this time, the window of opportunity for successful treatment of the SSNHL has passed. If that patient were to have had direct access to audiology services, their hearing loss would be quickly identified and a timely referral for otologic treatment would be made and very possibly saved their hearing

SB 943 will provide sensible updates to licensure statutes to ensure patients get the services they need from audiologists and timely referrals to other specialists. The bill will increase access, affordability, and quality of care for all Oregonians.

Outdated Licensure Statutes

- Oregon's current audiology licensure statutes are outdated and vague.
- Even tests like basic health screenings, which are routinely performed by medical assistants and smartphone apps are not expressly in the scope of audiologists. The auditory and vestibular systems are very interconnected with the rest of the body, creating necessity for audiology.
- SB 943 clarifies statute language to ensure health screenings and other procedures which audiologists are trained to perform are clearly written in our scope of practice.

Aligning Scope with Skills

- Like many states, Oregon is facing a shortage of primary care and specialist physicians, leading to burdensome, long wait times to see providers like otolaryngologists (ENTs).
- Through their doctoral education, audiologists are trained in identifying the “red flag” signs of lesions of the central auditory system and triaging which patients require further evaluation.
- Audiologists are also trained extensively in genetic causes of hearing loss, often being the first providers to identify these losses and work with families to create treatment plans.
- SB 943 would grant audiologists ordering rights for medical imaging and lab work would improve patient wait times and reduce the need for redundant appointments by allowing the earlier identification of otologic conditions, beginning treatment planning earlier, and making more accurate referrals to medical specialists.

Better Utilizing Clinic Resources

- Current statutes allow audiology assistants to conduct basic hearing tests under the supervision of physicians or naturopathic physicians, but not audiologists who specialize in assessment of human hearing.
- Allowing audiologists to supervise audiology assistants for basic hearing tests would allow audiologists to spend more of their time focusing on more complex patient cases.
- SB 943 would amend statute language to allow this type of careful supervision of audiology assistants under their license.

SB 943 offers a clear and safe path to improved patient care. These impacts will only be amplified for rural and otherwise underserved patients in our communities.

Thank you in advance for your consideration and support of this bill,

Sarah Echterkamp, AuD
 Doctor of Audiology

Willamette Falls Audiology