

February 17, 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 and balance disorders, 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.

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 when their needs fall outside an audiologist's scope of practice. *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Outdated Licensure Statutes

- Oregon's current audiology licensure statutes are outdated and vague, leading to uncertainty and reluctance to perform tests and interventions for which we have received training.
- 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. In fact, audiologists are often among the first medical professionals to notice changes in cognition and health. For example, we might see one of our geriatric patients every 6 months and determine that their responses to testing or questions about treatment don't align with previous abilities.
- 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. More often than not, imaging is required to rule out any medical issues contributing to a hearing deficit. Yet, patients must wait an average of 3-6 months in our area for an appointment with an ENT. Not only do they spend that time with increased anxiety, but they take ENT appointments that would be better kept by patients for whom real risks exist and the evaluation is more urgent.
- 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, reduced burden and cost to the medical system from delayed and unnecessary appointments, and a system where all involved medical professionals are free to practice at the top of their knowledge and training. 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,



Rachel Splan, AuD
Board Certified Doctor of Audiology
Salem Audiology Clinic, Inc.