

February 13, 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,

As an Oregonian and student in a local audiology program, I am writing 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 an entry-level degree in our profession. They receive 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. In addition to diagnosing and treating a wide range of conditions, audiology doctors are also responsible for triaging patients to physicians and other medical specialists when indicated.

SB 943 will sensibly update licensure statutes to ensure patients get the services they need from audiologists and timely referrals to other specialists when their needs fall outside the audiologist's scope of practice. As a student completing clinical rotations, I have seen the patients shuffled from one provider to another to receive vital imaging, blood work, etc., which only adds to their time spent getting necessary treatment. We should all be aware of the barriers to healthcare we and our peers face. This awareness calls for action to improve health and well-being in areas like audiology because the prevalence of hearing loss increases with every age decade. If hearing loss and ear-related issues have not affected you or someone you love yet, you can change the system to improve it for yourself and others. 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Outdated Licensure Statutes

- Oregon's current audiology licensure statutes are outdated and vague, leading to uncertainty and reluctance to perform tests and interventions for which we have received training.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 the 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, 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,

Holly Hambleton

B.A. in Communication Disorders, Minor in Linguistics

Pacific University School of Audiology