

February 18, 2025

Chair Deb Patterson
Vice Chair Cedric Hayden
Senate Committee on Health Care
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 Senate Committee on Health Care,

I am writing to express my wholehearted support for Senate Bill 943, a piece of legislation that will be instrumental in ensuring that every Oregonian, especially our children, has access to the hearing healthcare services they need. As a mother of two toddlers and a doctoral audiology student, I am acutely aware of the significance of timely access to audiological services, particularly for children who may face hearing loss or auditory processing challenges. This bill will have a profound impact on families, including those in rural and underserved communities, by reducing barriers to care and fostering equitable access to the resources necessary for optimal developmental outcomes.

As a mother, I understand how critical the early years of a child's life are for language development and overall growth. When a child experiences hearing loss or delays in auditory processing, it can significantly affect their ability to communicate, socialize, and develop foundational skills in language and literacy. Early intervention is essential for minimizing the impact of these issues and providing children with the best possible start in life. SB 943 supports this by allowing audiologists to play a more active role in early diagnosis, screenings, and interventions. It will help ensure that families have timely access to the necessary resources to address hearing-related challenges, which is crucial to preventing speech and language delays and improving educational outcomes.

In my training as a doctoral audiology student, I have gained extensive education and hands-on experience in diagnosing and managing a wide variety of hearing and balance disorders. SB 943 will allow audiologists to practice in a way that aligns with our expertise, ensuring that we can provide the high-quality care that our training prepares us for. This bill recognizes that audiologists, who hold a doctoral degree in the field, are equipped to handle many aspects of hearing healthcare, including health screenings,

diagnostic testing, and the management of hearing disorders, in addition to making appropriate referrals when necessary.

Particularly for children in rural and underserved communities, this bill will be transformative. By providing audiologists with the ability to order diagnostic tests such as imaging and lab work, SB 943 ensures that early conditions are detected sooner, enabling faster treatment and more accurate referrals to specialists when needed. This will significantly reduce unnecessary delays in care and eliminate redundancies in the healthcare process.

Additionally, SB 943 makes important updates to Oregon's outdated audiology licensure statutes, aligning them with current national standards and best practices in the field. These updates ensure that audiologists can practice to the full extent of their education and training, without overstepping into areas outside of our scope. It is important to note that audiologists are highly trained to manage hearing and balance disorders but are not trained to perform surgeries or prescribe medications. The bill is clear about the scope of our practice and explicitly prohibits actions outside the domain of audiology, such as performing surgery. These safeguards are important for maintaining patient safety while improving access to care.

As a doctoral audiology student, I see firsthand how the ability to provide care at the top of our training can reduce strain on other healthcare providers and increase efficiency in the healthcare system. With a shortage of primary care providers and specialists, especially in rural areas, SB 943 will ensure that audiologists are fully utilized in the healthcare system, addressing the needs of patients without unnecessary delays or additional barriers. Audiologists will be able to supervise assistants in basic procedures and screenings, thus allowing us to focus our expertise on more complex cases and provide better care for all Oregonians.

I urge you to support SB 943 and take the important steps toward improving access to hearing healthcare services for all Oregonians. This bill will help ensure that our children are diagnosed and treated in a timely manner, improving their quality of life and educational opportunities.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Liz Ureño, MA, MLS
Doctoral Audiology Student