

Submitter: Laurie Harrison

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee
On Education

Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB5515

Joint Subcommittee On Education,

My name is Laurie Harrison and for 20 years I have been the administrator of the Deaf/HH program at Northwest Regional Education Service District. During this time I have watched as our funding for Audiology services as well as that to support the work that Teachers of the Deaf/HH do has diminished while hiring such talented and specialized folks has become much more expensive.

The intention of having experts in the field of deafness work with children from birth to age 21 who have a hearing loss is to offer intense access to language and amplification at an early age so that these children are not in the position of having to establish a foundational language system at the same time that they are expected to learn core academic content in that language. In order to avoid this, children need access to oral/aural as well as potentially American Sign Language from the very first moment at which they are identified with a hearing loss, and it is the teachers of the deaf who provide support and guidance to families on how to offer this access.

Oregon no longer has a college preparatory program for Teachers of the Deaf, and thus we are in the position of hiring from out of state for these positions. The lack of funding to support making a move to Oregon worthwhile is greatly hurting our ability to provide excellent and adequate services to children. Teachers of the deaf provide instruction in the use of equipment, in Reading and Written Language, in Self-Advocacy, and offer the incredibly valuable service of supporting students in filling in the gaps in their learning that were caused by language deprivation stemming from hearing loss. This service is one that cannot be provided by a general education teacher or special education teacher who does not have the knowledge of the impact of language deprivation on learning. These positions are vital, and must be fully-funded such that children receive the level of service that they need, without systemic barriers in the way.

Our Audiology practice once had 2.5 FTE audiologists. We now have 1.0 FTE and are grateful for the work that our audiologist does, every day. Identifying children with a hearing loss and ensuring that they have as much auditory access through assisted listening devices as is possible is crucial, and the funding for Audiology services has decreased over the years to the point at which we are no longer able to purchase ample technology to adequately support students in a preschool or K-12 setting.

Please consider fully-funding Regional Programs so that the needs of our most vulnerable children with low incidence disabilities can be met!

Laurie Harrison, Ed.D.
Administrator of Deaf/HH Services
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