

The Honorable Representative Valderrama
900 Court St. NE, H-286
Salem, Oregon 97301
March 21, 2025

Nancy Otte
3720 S. Bond Ave. #1900
Portland, Oregon 97239

Dear Representative Valderrama,

I am a senior citizen who is deaf from infancy but raised in a hearing family and hearing schools, learning speech and English. For decades, I taught the deaf and hard-of-hearing, some in an American Sign Language (ASL) day school for the Deaf, and others who used speech and English in the mainstream, otherwise known as "hearing schools." This is a statement in support of investment in OSD.

Many people, not understanding the complexity of growing up with deafness, may think: "Why invest in a state school or an ASL school? Don't we have cochlear implants now? Don't we teach children to speak now? Don't we want the deaf to live in a hearing world? Those state schools are a relic of the past, best left to rot and close."

The truth is that there are many factors which determine educational outcomes of children. Like hearing children, deaf and hard-of-hearing students have varied abilities and cannot achieve success with only one type of learning environment. State schools for the Deaf provide invaluable support for the students and families who need it. Some children have Deaf parents who are part of "Deaf Culture." Being like their parents in an ASL environment is only natural and paramount to their happiness. Some deaf children of hearing parents are unable to thrive in their neighborhood hearing school and cannot reach their potential without the state school for the Deaf. They then find their comfort zone, their tribe, their ASL language, and move on to productive adulthoods. OSD, however, is in dire need of renewal to facilitate learning and community-building.

The state schools for the Deaf are centers for adults in the Deaf Culture, as well. Without an ASL center, the Deaf are often isolated in their own homes and families, unable or unwelcome to participate fully in society. The more effective the hub, the more contributory the Deaf community can be to the hearing world – economically, politically, and socially.

The need for design that fosters learning and community-building is even greater among the Deaf than it is among the hearing since the Deaf have a visual language unique in the world. The sense of hearing, by itself, gives people a wealth of understanding about everything in their daily lives. With the absence of hearing, one is left with only vision, touch, intelligence, and language, if one is dependent on American Sign Language to understand. We owe the Deaf our respect by investing in OSD's future. Thank you for considering these thoughts.

Sincerely yours,

Nancy Otte