

Submitter: Ruth Shelly
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee
On Education
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB5515

Dear Legislators,

Please accept my written testimony urging full funding for Columbia Regional Inclusive Services through SB 5515.

Almost three years ago, our first granddaughter was born profoundly deaf—unable to hear and ineligible for a cochlear implant. She would never learn to speak. You can imagine the initial devastation we all felt as parents and grandparents. How would we ever communicate with our darling Esperanza?

Esperanza means “hope,” and that’s exactly what we received through Columbia Regional Inclusive Services. Learning American Sign Language (ASL) along with Espe was critical. The encouragement from Inclusive Services was coupled with practical, effective practice:

- Diana Kincaid, Early Intervention Teacher of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, works weekly with Espe at her preschool—and not just alone with her, but with her teachers and other children as well, so that the whole class is becoming ASL proficient.
- As we got started, Inclusive Services sent a Deaf teacher to our daughter and son-in-law’s home, to work with them weekly in their living environment. As grandparents, my husband and I found these lessons so useful, we would drive in from Lincoln City to learn together as a family.
- Every month, Inclusive Services hosts a Deaf Playgroup and ASL Classes for families, so that we can meet and learn from other children, parents, and grandparents who are sharing our journey.
- Deaf Playgroup is held in the same room at Wilcox Elementary where Espe will be attending ASL Preschool when she turns three. There is no other option for immersive Deaf preschool anywhere in Portland. We are so grateful for this experience, which will prepare her for Deaf kindergarten in a couple of years.

Over 90% of Deaf children are born to hearing parents, meaning many parents encounter deafness for the first time when their child is diagnosed. Columbia Regional Inclusive Services brought us not only hope and reassurance but also

training and confidence that we can support Espe as she grows into a fully functioning, contributing young adult. Investment in early intervention is the key, and the best investment you can make as lawmakers is to retain full funding for Columbia Regional Inclusive Services through SB 5515.

Thank you for your support!

Ruth and Kevin Shelly
Neotsu, Oregon