

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

Co-Chairs Sollman and Ruiz and Members of the Subcommittee on Education,

The Oregon Lions Sight & Hearing Foundation (OLSHF) respectfully submits this testimony in strong support of maintaining the \$1.5 million in funding to reimburse vision screenings in Oregon's public schools. This investment ensures that all students—particularly young learners in their foundational academic years—receive timely, accurate vision assessments that are essential for classroom engagement and long-term success.

About OLSHF's Vision Screening Program

For over 30 years, OLSHF has led statewide efforts to provide vision screenings in school settings. To date, we have screened more than 2 million Oregon students. In the current 2024–2025 school year, we are on track to screen approximately 195,000 students. Based on screening outcomes, approximately 17% will be referred for further examination due to indicators of potential vision challenges.

Our screening method uses an objective, digital photo-screening device designed for rapid, accurate assessments. These devices are ideally suited to school environments—they do not require verbal responses or reading ability. If a child can look at the screening device for a few seconds, the technology can assess key vision risk factors, helping to detect potential issues early and equitably across age groups and learning levels.

Rising Referral Rates Signal Growing Need

Recent screening cycles have shown a steady rise in referral rates—suggesting that more students are arriving in school with undiagnosed or unaddressed vision problems. This increase may reflect a number of contributing factors, including more screen time and limited early access to vision care. The result is a growing demand for reliable vision checks early in a student's academic journey.

Data Integrity and Program Efficiency

OLSHF operates a secure data management system that ensures all student screening information is handled responsibly, in accordance with state and federal privacy standards. This system enables accurate reporting, secure recordkeeping, and consistent tracking of screening outcomes statewide.

Ensuring Access for All Oregon Students

The current reimbursement model, authorized under ORS 336.211, allows approved providers to serve students in every part of Oregon—urban, rural, and remote. Sustained funding ensures that schools, regardless of size or location, can offer this critical service without having to choose between vision care and other essential resources. This is a highly efficient and scalable model that benefits thousands of students each year.

Conclusion

Objective vision screenings are a practical, measurable, and low-cost way to support student success. Early detection leads to timely intervention, helping students stay on track academically and developmentally. OLSHF urges the Joint Committee on Ways and Means to preserve the \$1.5 million allocation, ensuring continued statewide access to these critical screenings for Oregon's children.

With appreciation,

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