

March 19, 2015

Senator Sara Gelser, Chair
Senate Committee on Health Care and Early Childhood
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Senator Sara Gelser,

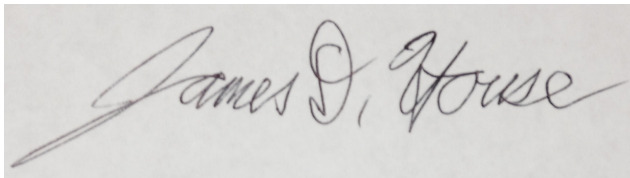
More than 186,000 Oregonians live with varying levels of hearing disabilities. As an “invisible” disability, it is easily overlooked, and this population is often underserved or unserved. For years they have been unable to receive direct communication access and support services from state agencies, non-profit organizations, and businesses in the community because they do not provide the necessary cultural and linguistic competency services, nor can existing budgets of governmental programs begin to accommodate those services. Oregonians with hearing loss encounter daily discrimination, oppression, and barriers to employment and recreation. It has been estimated that 70% of Americans who are deaf, deaf-blind or hard of hearing are either unemployed or underemployed. Senate Bill 449 will begin to remove those barriers.

Senate Bill 449 will establish an Office of Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing Services (ODDBHHS) in Oregon. ODDBHHS will provide information and referral, advocacy, case management, education, and training, and will serve as the state authority on Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing citizens. It will address the entire range of needs of its clients that spans from birth to death.

This bill will begin to provide the functional equivalency for employment, recreation, and life that these citizens deserve. Other states that have implemented similar services recognize that its purpose in restoring these individuals into fully contributing and productive taxpayers,

Please support Senate Bill 449.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "James D. House". The signature is written in dark ink on a light-colored background.

James House

cc: Oregon Association of the Deaf, Inc.