

The Hon. Sara Gelser,  
Chairwoman before the Senate Committee  
on Health Care and Early Childhood  
Oregon State Legislature  
900 Court Street NE  
Salem, OR 9730

Dear Representative Gelser,

The upcoming legislation SB 449, which will require the state of Oregon to establish an office for the d/Deaf and Hard of Hearing is of great importance to me. Currently, I serve as Secretary to the Board of Oregon Deaf Empowerment & Advocacy for Families (ODEAF), a budding non-profit organization intent on providing services to survivors of domestic and sexual violence. I also belong to the advisory committee for Oregon Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services (ODHHS) which works closely with the Department of Human Services and Aging and People with Disabilities.

After graduating from Portland Community College with a degree in Deaf Studies in 2013 and transferring to Portland State University, I knew that I wanted to combine my non-native fluency in American Sign Language with my passion for politics in order to advocate for the rights of Deaf people. There is no better place to start my career than my home state of Oregon because frankly, our disability accommodations, particularly those for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, are deplorable. Nowhere in our state can a person who uses sign language enter an agency and receive direct services from someone who can effectively communicate with them. The process of requesting an interpreter and setting up an appointment is unclear and inaccessible to many. Do we really want our state just meeting the bare minimum requirements of the ADA? Is this equality?

The need for direct services is very real. As survivor of domestic violence and someone who works with others who have suffered trauma, it is imperative that those seeking help receive care in their native language and by those who understand their cultural perspective. Imagine requiring an interpreter (or two) to explain an abuse situation. Imagine needing an interpreter in the mental healing process. Imagine needing an interpreter to do a rape kit. In these situations the last thing the survivor wants or needs is extraneous people involved. These examples are specific to my field, however, even simple processes like applying for SNAP or taking the written driving test become frustrating ordeals for people who use sign language.

I strongly urge you to support SB 449 in the upcoming legislative session. Thank you for reviewing and taking my appeal into consideration.

Sincerely,

Kelsey Gleeson  
Oregon Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services  
Advisory Committee Member