

# ***Southwest Washington Center of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing***



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February 12, 2015

The Hon. Sara Gelser,  
Chairwoman before the Senate Committee  
on Health Care and Early Childhood  
Oregon State Legislature  
900 Court Street NE  
Salem, OR 97301

Honorable Chairwoman Gelser:

A hard of hearing elderly woman owned a house in rural southwestern Washington that became inhabitable as a result of storm damage. The woman could not afford the needed repairs, so she became homeless, but could not find appropriate resources in the area. As a result, she moved to a run-down motel in Oregon to live at — which meant we could no longer serve her needs, since she was now an Oregon resident. Yet she does not have access to resources in Oregon because there is no central agency serving Deaf, DaefBlind, and Hard of Hearing individuals.

As an organization that collaborates with Deaf and hard of hearing Oregonians, and provides services to numerous Portlanders who are deaf or hard of hearing, the Southwest Washington Center of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (SWCDHH) lends its support to S.B. 449. S.B. 449 seeks to create a permanent Office for Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing Services (ODDBHHS). This bill, sponsored by Sen. Laurie Monnes Anderson, also asks the Department of Human Services to require that social services be provided for the 186,000 Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing Oregonians.

Currently, SWCDHH has faced insurmountable obstacles in trying to work with area residents who are deaf or hard of hearing. Although Portland is only a few miles away, we are unable to refer them to resources, housing, facilities and services there because of state lines and regulations. As a result, they are forced to travel north to Seattle, far away from their families and support systems. This in turn creates further hardship for them, and exacerbates the need for resources that we cannot give them.

Vancouver is wrought with people who are deaf, deaf-blind and hard of hearing and in desperate need of services, but because of their financial restraints, they cannot afford to come to Washington. They find themselves caught in a Catch-22 situation because they have no access to services in Oregon, yet they cannot afford to come back to Washington. That homeless woman, for example, continues to call us for assistance — but we cannot help her given her residency.

Another example is a Deaf-Blind woman who is extremely isolated at home. We offer an outstanding program for Deaf-Blind individuals, but cannot serve her even if she lives only a few miles away, because she is an Oregon resident. If this law were to be enacted, we could work closely with ODDBHHS in ensuring that Oregon residents can utilize similar services.

This could be easily alleviated if Oregon had services that met standards for people who are Deaf, DeafBlind or Hard of Hearing. And that is what S.B. 449 proposes. It would work in partnership with services and organizations in the state of Washington, such as the Washington Office of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services, and SWCDHH. SWCDHH has seen firsthand the great, desperate need for ODDBHHS in Oregon, and fully supports the critical nature of the bill's passage.

Sincerely,

Deba Pietsch  
Executive Director