

March 26, 2015

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

Dear Senator Gelser,

Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Deafblind individuals all face a number of common problems in their lives: Access to information; communication; and service providers, employers, businesses and others who should be providing access to their services but who are not. Many people without these losses believe that there are plenty of services available and that businesses and government entities are well aware of what is required under the ADA, or alternatively, that there are very few people who are impacted by these disabilities or that hearing loss alone is not a substantial disability...until they encounter someone with such losses. Or until they seek out services for a loved one.

The reality is that each of these groups is in desperate need of services and information. Because communication is involved, the need extends beyond the individual to everyone they come into contact with through the daily course of their lives. While anyone can experience these losses at any point in their lives, according to the Pew Research Center, 10,000 baby boomers will turn 65 every day from January 1, 2011 to January 1, 2030. This is important because hearing loss, vision loss, and other disabilities accompany aging. One third of the population over 65 experiences hearing loss. Hearing loss does not come with a manual, and the irony is that the hearing and vision loss may cut people off from being able to ask the questions and understand (hear) the answers.

It is long past time that Oregon should have a system of service centers set up throughout the state to address the information, referral, advocacy, and resource needs of its Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Deafblind citizens. Other states, such as Washington and Utah, have such service centers established. I urge you to bring SB 449 to the floor in the Senate and House with a DO PASS recommendation.

Thank you for your consideration and support.

Regards,  
Cheryl Davis