

Testimony Concerning SB 449
Steven M Brown, MPA, MA
03/26/2015 at 3pm
Salem, Oregon

Chair Senator Gelser, and the Members of the Committee:

Hello. My name is Steven M. Brown, and I live in Southeast Portland. As Chair of the Legislation Committee of our organization, the Oregon Association of the Deaf (OAD,) I am here to represent us as a whole.

I have been profoundly deaf since I was five months old as a long-term complication resulting from spinal meningitis. I am here to testify in the strongest possible support of SB 449. We must create stronger and more stable delivery mechanisms within every office, and provide the best quality of social services wherever, whenever and however possible for Deaf, Deaf-Blind, and hard of Hearing Oregonians throughout our great state.

Social services for this bill will be provided by the Department of Human Services (DHS,) administered by Mr. Michael McCormick, Deputy Director of the Aging and People with Disabilities (APD) division. I am very pleased to report that Mr. McCormick is here to share his testimony today because we have been working on new amendments to SB 449.

I am also very delighted to report that we, the Deaf, Deaf-Blind, and Hard of Hearing community members, whole-heartedly support such amendments on SB 449 and look forward to working with DHS. We want to strengthen our working relationships with DHS, as well as with Deaf, Deaf-Blind, and Hard of Hearing state employees and consumers.

I am also pleased to report that our State Representative David Gomberg is here to share his testimony as well. He is one of our chief sponsors on this particular bill. Senator Laurie Monnes

Anderson is also here, and, in fact, is one of members of this committee. Senator Monnes Anderson is also our chief sponsor, and was also a former State Representative who supported our HB 3230C legislation, which was passed back in 2005.

Back then, I was a legislative intern then for former State Representative Steve March, from 2002 to 2006. He was responsible to drafting and passing HB 3230 legislation, after our former OAD President, Renwick Dayton consulted with his former State District Senator, Bruce Starr. The bill successfully became a new law after former Governor Ted Kulongoski signed it in June 2005.

HB 3230C created a legislative directive for DHS to form an advisory committee which would provide support for the DHS director to determine whether social services are needed, in particular for Deaf, Deaf-Blind, and Hard of Hearing populations. We are here to voice the strongest support possible for SB 449 to be passed with your recommendation, simply because it would expand and thus strengthen current HB 3230C provisions.

I am pleased to report that we have State Representative Gomberg and Senator Monnes Anderson as two of the strongest supporters for our SB 449 efforts. It makes me proud beyond words to add that they both have sisters who are also deaf. We are very humbled to welcome them on behalf of the Deaf community, and to it.

I also wish to express my deepest and sincerest thanks to Senator Sara Gelser, the Chairwoman of this committee for her generous support of legislation that has pushed the Oregon Department of Education (DOE) to recognize students having modified high school diplomas as equivalent to those having standard high school diplomas.

Because of Senator Gelser's extraordinary efforts, Deaf students with modified high school diplomas are now considered no different in status than those who receive standard high school diplomas. Today's agenda includes the hearing on Senator's Gelser's closed-captioning legislation. We are very proud to support this as well.

Perhaps some of you sitting before this committee may wonder what SB 449 is. Permit me to share a bit. SB 449 is a legislation that would improve DHS' capability to restore and reboot existing resources within HB 3230C, even with new requirements for DHS to provide support staff for the advisory committee to run programs.

Having advisory committee is an important and vital instrumental for DHS to determine appropriate needs for services. SB 449 will require the DHS to conduct community statewide assessments. The intention behind doing these assessments is to demonstrate a clear and compelling need for services. This will provide a tool to advise DHS on what types of services are needed and in what specific regions of our great state.

Additionally, these assessments will serve as a tool for DHS to deliver social services and predict need for future services, hopefully with plenty of streamlining of adequate funds which DHS is required to seek. We anticipate that SB 449 will have a very minimal fiscal impact on the DHS budget because DHS is going to use existing personnel to continue running current and new programs.

However, we ideally seek a small amount of funding that perhaps will help these programs run even more smoothly. I expect to seek adequate and reasonable funding you can reasonably agree with, without putting it in jeopardy.

Finally, and before I take your questions, I would like to end my testimony with a brief mention of our former Governor Robert Straub's legacy. Former Governor Straub is well remembered for his contributions to environmental issues, but he was also instrumental in pushing for better quality of life for people with disabilities.

Gov. Straub had the Disability Task force established in 1976. It was disbanded in 1981 to give way for what is now called the Oregon Commission on Disability. That is why we are here.

Additionally, Straub was also the first Governor in history that pushed state agencies more people with diverse backgrounds, including women, people with disabilities, and minority groups to employ in these departments. Former Governor Tom McCall did just that, too. We would like to see SB 449 make Mr. McCall and Mr. Straub's legacy an even stronger and more vital reality.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify before you today. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Respectfully Submitted,



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