

March 26, 2019

Dear Chair Barker and members of the committee,

My name is Jessica Kaady and I am a certified Spanish/English Interpreter. I have been in this profession for five years, during which I have held contracts with four different agencies within the state of Oregon. I am writing in favor of HB 2231.

HB 2231 will help to raise awareness of best practices in the interpreting profession and ensure we are following existing law. Currently Oregon law mandates that Coordinate Care Facilities use certified and qualified interpreters be used “whenever possible.” However, we regularly see these paying entities along with interpreting agencies that provide interpreters to said CCO’s disregard this law. Unfortunately, this diminishes the quality of interpreting services patients and providers receive. Through collective bargaining we hope to raise industry standards and advocate for accountability of all the stakeholders. The center of our work continues to be providing quality care and interpretation to our patients that is founded in respect, compassion, safety and attention to the most elevated level of language access. In my personal experience on the job I have been privy to many stories recounted by both patients and providers about encounters they have had with untrained and uncertified interpreters that left a negative and lasting mark. With HB 2231 we hope to raise awareness of best practices in our profession and ensure we are following existing law in order to ensure quality care for all clients and patients.

Scheduling and fair pay continue to be at the center of the issues that healthcare interpreters face. I have personal experience with this. After investing time and financial resources to become nationally certified, the agencies I contracted with reduced my workload such that earning a living as a nationally certified interpreter became impossible.

How did this happen? When I notified the agencies of an increase in my rates to \$30/hr to reflect my new certification, one response I got was I would have to be available at any time and be willing to travel any distance to whatever job they assigned me, with no guarantee of how many hours they would provide. This sounds like a staff interpreter position, not freelance. However, they offered no W-2 or employees benefits.

The second agency’s response was I would no longer be offered new work. They would only assign me appointments where the client had requested me by name. Feeling I had no other option, I accepted this agency’s terms and earned a fraction of what I had earned prior to becoming certified. Later, after a hiatus due to personal issues, this same agency said they would only continue contracting with me if I agreed to reduce my rate by \$5/hr, bringing me to \$25/hr.

This reduced workload made working as a full-time, agency-contracted interpreter impossible for me. If obtaining training and certification is required by law, there needs to be reward for following through instead of penalty. Certification requires continuing education and other related costs. I believe in the importance of training and certification and want to support interpreters’ efforts in this as a means to fair pay and scheduling.

Through this bill we hope to bridge the communication gap between interpreters, agencies and clients and strengthen internal communication systems. We want to work together to solidify what the expectations should be in order to strengthen our services. In my experience as an interpreter I have witnessed an “us vs. them” type of atmosphere which only works to create more barriers in reaching our shared goal of providing fair language access for patients and clients. It has been frustrating for me to be viewed as someone who just wants more money instead of being respected as a hard-working professional who seeks fair compensation

for the important work I do. I envision an environment fostering full transparency between agencies, interpreters, clients and patients, one in which interpreters feel respected and able to do our work. When all parties involved are coming together to create, communicate and uphold clear expectations, only then can we achieve the highest quality results in our work and everyone's crucial role be solidified.

I am in full support of HB 2231. Please join me in supporting this bill. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Jessica Kaady
CMI-Spanish