

Dear Chair Salinas, Vice Chairs Hayden and Nosse, and Members of the Committee,

I'm Dr. Maggie Wells, a Family Medicine resident physician in Portland and Beaverton with a background in public policy, here to respectfully request your support of SB 698.

Caring for men, women, and children in hospitals and clinics across Oregon, I know all too well the unfortunately common – and entirely preventable – harms that result when we abdicate responsibility for legible labels on medication bottles. Just one example among many is the story of a 7-year-old Laotian-American girl I admitted to our Children's Hospital for fever. Leilani was shy, all smiles, bundled in a fluffy pink blanket from home, doting family members at bedside day and night. She has a chronic medical condition that affects her immune system; she depends on twice daily penicillin to prevent the serious infections her body can't fight off on its own. Without it she can die.

Leilani's family, medical team, and interpreter reviewed her home medication bottles. What her father thought was penicillin was, in fact, her vitamin. Leilani hadn't gotten her penicillin in days. A look of horror fell over Leilani's father's face. He turned toward his daughter, eyes welling up with tears, and buried his face in his hands. I too felt deeply ashamed of how my medical system and my State's broader health policies had failed his family. By withholding crucial information we had rendered him powerless to protect his daughter from serious harm.

When Leilani was well enough to go home, I ordered her a new penicillin prescription, calling the Pharmacist directly to request it be labelled both in English and in Lao. The Pharmacist informed me this was not possible, that our hospital would not accept responsibility for the accuracy of both labels, thereby re-creating the potentially deadly, and entirely preventable, scenario that had caused her hospital admission in the first place.

Leilani's story shows why families and physicians need SB 698. Change is never easy, but on this issue, the status quo is untenable. Oregonians with limited English proficiency have a right to understand their medication label, because the only difference between a medicine and a poison is understanding how to use it. Giving someone a pill bottle with an illegible label is dangerous and wrong, and our patients, constituents, and neighbors deserve better.

I urge the Committee to approve this important legislation.

Sincerely,  
Maggie Wells, MD MPP  
Portland Family Medicine Resident Physician