

Rep. Rachel Prusak, Chair  
House Committee on Health Care  
900 Court St. NE  
Salem, OR 97301

April 6, 2021

SUBJECT: Support for HB3231, the Oregon Sign Language Interpreter Licensure Bill

To the Chair Prusak, Vice-Chair Hayden, Vice-Chair Salinas, and members of the Committee:

My name is Tamera J. Richards and I am a Sign Language Interpreter. I am writing to urge the Committee's support of HB3231.

HB3231 will protect the more than 180,000 Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing Oregonians in our state by establishing a licensure requirement for Sign Language interpreters. Currently in Oregon, anyone can legally represent themselves as a Sign Language interpreter whether or not they are qualified and provide services in settings such as emergency press-conferences, drug treatment facilities, or attorney-client meetings. This results in unqualified or unethical interpreting services, violating the rights of Deaf, Deafblind, and Hard of Hearing Oregonians and potentially causing great harm to consumers. Along with the risk to the consumers, hiring entities including government agencies are at risk of lawsuits if they hire interpreters who are unqualified.

HB3231 will create a State Board of Sign Language Interpreters within Oregon Health Authority, outline requirements for interpreter licensure and establish standards for the profession. It will also protect consumers and hiring entities by requiring licensure to work as a Sign Language interpreter in Oregon. Over 30 states have established such requirements for Sign Language interpreters and the passing of this bill would ensure Oregon is in line with national best practices.

Too many times the use of unqualified interpreters or no interpreter at all has impacted the lives of Deaf and hard-of-hearing people negatively. Imagine having your doctor ask your child to give you a terminal cancer diagnosis, or try to explain to you what is happening in your court hearing? This kind of thing goes on all the time. Imagine trying to get an education, and the "interpreter" in front of you is holding a sign language book because they don't even know the language? Imagine trying to negotiate aftercare or preparation for a surgery with someone who "knows a little sign language" but doesn't understand you, and who you don't understand? These are DAILY realities for Deaf people and it needs to STOP. People need to be held accountable for obtaining qualified interpreting services, and people need to be held accountable for holding themselves out as qualified interpreters when they ARE NOT.

I respectfully ask for the Committee's support of HB3231 the Oregon Sign Language Interpreter Licensure Bill because this law will protect the rights of Oregon's Deaf, Deafblind, and Hard of Hearing citizens.

Sincerely,  
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