

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

My name is Christina Healy. I am an ASL interpreter, interpreter educator, ASL linguist, and friend of many Deaf Oregonian citizens. I am writing to urge the Committee's support of HB3231.

During the 18 years of my career, I have seen the power that interpreters hold while we control the information that English speakers and ASL users access in a wide-range of settings. From doctor's appointments to legislative hearings, from students meeting with professors to Child Protective Service case workers meeting with families in crisis, interpreters control who knows what and when. Given the power that this job yields, it is critical that people who represent themselves interpreters be held to at least a minimal standard of ethical practices and quality of services.

So far in Oregon (unlike dozens of other states), no legal standard has been required to provide interpreting services. Consequently, it is far too common for people in non-interpreting roles: government employees, medical staff, children of Deaf parents, and others to attempt communication services -- willingly or coerced by employers -- when they have no training and minimal language skills. The consequences can range from frustrated patients postponing medical care to children being removed from homes due to miscommunication, costing the state financially and causing preventable trauma. Requiring a license to practice signed language interpreting is a significant step toward ensuring Oregon citizens clear and accurate communication between English and American Sign Language. It also can protect non-interpreting staff from employer coercion into unethical circumstances.

This bill 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. This results in unqualified or unethical interpreting services, violating the rights of our 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, establish standards for the profession and by doing this 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.

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,
Christina Healy

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