

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 Chelsea Flora, I am a former Sign Language Interpreter and current Deaf Educator. I am writing to urge the Committee's support of HB3231.

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 and provide services in settings such as: emergency press conferences, drug treatment facilities, emergency medical situations or attorney-client meetings. 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.

As a former Sign Language Interpreter, I have witnessed firsthand how unqualified and unethical interpreters impact Deaf, DeafBlind, and hard of hearing Oregonians. When accompanying a Deaf friend to the Emergency Room one terrifying night, I witnessed firsthand the lack of knowledge, education and comprehension of an unqualified interpreter. This interpreter did not interpret all of the doctor's questions, made numerous mistakes, misunderstood my friend's answers, omitted vital information, and seemingly 'played' with my dear friend's life. Feeling outraged, attempting to cope with the emergency in front of me, and having to correct this interpreter's interpretations is

not an experience I wish on anyone. This interpreter cost my friend and medical professionals precious time. Time in the midst of an emergency is the literal difference between life and death. This is unacceptable and it needs to change. I hold Oregon to the highest of standards and I hope you will join me.

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,

*Chelsea Flora*

Chelsea Flora  
14925 Hidden Hills Road  
McMinnville, Oregon 97128