

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:

Before I begin with this letter, I wanted to take a moment to be transparent that I work as a Director of Research & Resource Center with Deaf communities (RRCD) at Western Oregon University, Executive Director with Bridges Oregon, Inc., and serve on several state advisory committees. I am certified through Oregon Healthcare Interpreter (OHCI) and am a qualified Deaf Interpreter. I am here only to represent my role as a Deaf Legislative Advocate on behalf of Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing Oregonian.

I am writing to urge this Committee to support HB 3231.

HB 3231 will protect more than 1 million individuals who are living with hearing loss in the state of Oregon and the 4,021 Oregonians who use sign language to communicate (source: BridgesOregon.org) by establishing a licensure requirement for Sign Language interpreters. Currently anyone in Oregon can legally represent themselves as a Sign Language interpreter whether or not they are qualified. This includes interpreters who have failed their certification exams or had their certifications revoked for unethical practices. These unqualified individuals 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 unqualified interpreters.

A few example of unqualified or unethical interpreting in our state as noted from the 2016 Community-Based Needs Assessment (source: wou.edu/rrcd/cna) as follows:

- "...they just found somebody who was a parent who could sign and happened to be hard of hearing to interpret my 300 level English Course" (pp. 30).
- "...I need someone who knows the jargon because that could cost me my job. If they are incompetent, they can make me look bad and people won't realize that

[it's really the interpreter's problem]" (pp. 42).

- "...an interpreter, but they said we didn't need one. I wonder if they were trying to save money by using this woman who worked at the doctor's clinic" (pp. 64).

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 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.

On a personal note, I've had many of my own experiences with unqualified and unethical interpreters. I'll share just a few of these examples:

- A 19 year-old, who had never been to an interpreting training program or held any interpreter-related credentials, attempted to interpret my mother's mental health appointment. Without proper training my mother's voice wasn't clearly represented which left her with the inability to build rapport with the clinician, and denied the clinician the ability to get a complete view of my mother's mental health condition which threatened her proper diagnosis and treatment.
- An uncertified interpreter misunderstood the name of my prescription medication. This misunderstanding diverted the conversation away from beneficial treatments and led to focusing on medical options that could have potentially caused me harm. Without the transparency provided by qualified interpreters the provider assumed I was confused about my medications resulting in me having to prove wrong this inaccurate impression of my ability to understand my medications.
- An unqualified interpreter interpreted a child welfare investigation and the misinterpretation created much more harm to the Deaf family. The result of the misinterpretation was so severe that it required my intervention as an independent advocate. Ultimately, the damage was too great to be undone, causing permanent trauma to this family.

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,

Chad A. Ludwig, MSW, ADAC, OHCI, DI
Deaf Legislative Advocate