

Sen. Kathleen Taylor
Senate Committee on Labor and Business 900 Court St. NE
Salem, OR 97301

January 26th, 2022

SUBJECT: Support for SB1562, the Oregon Sign Language Interpreter Licensure Bill

To the Chair Taylor, Vice-Chair Knopp, and members of the Committee:

My name is Alyce De Mers. I am a consumer of interpreting services.. I am writing to urge the Committee's support of SB1562.

This bill will protect the more than 180,000 Deaf, Deaf/Blind, 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, Deaf/Blind, 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.

SB1652 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 did make some complaints to the Scheduling Dept. at the Summit Medical Group, formerly Bend Medical Clinic, why I was not notified that there will be no interpreter for my doctor appointments after I showed up for my appointments. We only have 3-4 non certified interpreters in our 200+ deaf, deaf/blind and hard of hearing community.

To my understanding, the agency who handles providing the services didn't meet our deaf community's needs in a professional way. The agency does not have the ability to screen the interpreter's qualifications when they are hired. We don't have any certified interpreters for our medical settings, only non-certified (generalist) which frustrated me. Summit Medical Group won't let me pick another agency in our town that has more certified interpreters because they have a contract with the original agency. What I would like to see is to allow us to pick an interpreting agency of our choice which is available in our town.

I respectfully ask for the Committee's support of SB1562 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,

Alice De Mers
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