

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

January 27, 2022

SUBJECT: Support for 1562, the Oregon Sign Language Interpreter Licensure Bill

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

I am writing to urge this Committee to support SB 1562.,

This bill is important to me because as a Deaf person, I am a consumer of interpreting services. However, I am also the owner of a language services company, Stellar Communications, LLC, which provides interpreting services for the state of Oregon. I bring the unique perspective of understanding this issue from both sides.

Through my business, I currently contract with both nationally certified and uncertified interpreters which I have deemed competent. The creation of a sign language interpreter licensure system will help me to ensure that the interpreters I contract with are capable of working in the settings I send them, rather than the current system where I am left to take them at their word based on their credentials, training, and references. Many agencies do not have the specialized training or experience to make appropriate staffing decisions.

This bill protects all stakeholders from instances where an interpreter is matched incorrectly with a setting they are unqualified for, whether intentionally or unintentionally, and holds the interpreter and language services company to a level of accountability that has historically been impossible.

I hope that this bill will be taken seriously so that the rights of Deaf, DeafBlind, hard of hearing consumers are respected and they are able to receive accessibility services by highly trained, and credentialed professionals for interpreting services in Oregon. This bill will raise the standard of credentials and training to meet the standards previously set forth by the state but thus far unenforced. This will dramatically increase the quality of services for the Deaf community in the state of Oregon, protecting them from incompetent and untrained interpreters and unethical language service companies that prioritize the least skilled because of the lower cost.

To speak to my experience as a Deaf consumer of interpreting services, many years ago I had to attend court due to a personal matter. As we all know, court can be an overwhelming experience under the best of circumstances. To my horror, the person I was presented with was not a qualified sign language interpreter or even someone with formal training, but I person who knew a homemade system of gesture and who had been found through an ad in a newspaper. This person refused to tell the court that I didn't understand them, told them I was lying about not being able to understand them, a clear example of their lack of professionalism. The result was that I had to wait three more weeks to resolve this matter, which has a huge (and unnecessary) impact on my life. This bill will prevent situations like this from happening to others.

As both a Deaf person and the owner of a language services company, urge you to vote in support of SB1562.

Carla Baker  
CEO Stellar Communications LLC