

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.

My name is Vanessa Bishop. I am a nationally certified sign language interpreter. I am NIC certified through the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, CoreCHI certified through the Certification Commission on Healthcare Interpreters (CCHI), and an Oregon Certified Health Care Interpreter currently registered with the Oregon Health Authority. I have a Bachelor's of Science in ASL/English Interpretation and have averaged approximately 100 hours of continuing education per year - half of which is specific to healthcare interpreting. My training and credentials allow me to provide the quality of service that allows for "clear and accurate communication and the development of empathy, confidence and mutual trust that is essential for an effective relationship between health care provider and patient", to quote ORS 413.552. However, this does not afford me priority with language access companies in Oregon. While ORS 413.522 section 3 states "It is the policy of the Legislative Assembly to require the use of certified health care interpreters or qualified health care interpreters whenever possible to ensure the accurate and adequate provision of health care to persons with limited English proficiency and to persons who communicate in sign language" because of the phrase "whenever possible" this rule has not been enforced by the state and has been largely ignored by interpreters, providers, and language access companies.

As a result, I compete with individuals working as interpreters with little to no formal training, little to no healthcare interpreter training, no credentials, and ultimately people whom operate under no accountability or oversight. Often I am competing at a disadvantage because these interpreters charge a marginally lower rate for their services. This reality is not unique to sign language interpreting, but occurs across languages. This puts your constituents lives at risk and calls into question the accuracy and completeness of the medical care they receive.

I can speak to this reality personally because I was that person. I began my interpreting career in Oregon without training or credentials. I know there were times that I was the biggest barrier in the room for a person seeking healthcare, an education, or a job. I didn't know better and there were no systems in place to vet people like me out of the pool of working interpreters in Oregon. Those experiences drove me to pursue years of training and to obtain credentials, but many do not simply because it is not an enforced requirement in our state.

Training and credentials equip an interpreter with the tools to produce a more accurate and complete interpretation. Dozens of other states have instituted state laws to ensure that those providing interpreting services are truly qualified to do so. In Oregon, one needs over 1,000 hours of training and a state licence to cut hair (a skilled profession, to be sure), but functionally, anyone can walk into a language services company with zero hours of training, claim to be an interpreter, and be in an Emergency department, surgery center-- or even a patient's home--within days. One impact of the passage of SB1562 will be to enforce the existing requirement of 60 hours of healthcare interpreter training for practitioners involved in some of the most critical and intimate moments of a person's life.

The people of Oregon deserve better. The Deaf community has had federal laws in place for decades to ensure their language access rights are protected, however the current lack of enforcement of ORS 413.550 leaves a loophole for these rights to be violated on a daily basis, across our great state.

I beg you to support SB1562. It will support the enforcement of existing policies and the protection of interpreters, of patients rights, and of healthcare providers ability to serve their patients through accurate and complete interpretation. It will create a much need licensure that will protect the citizens of Oregon and provide a centralized way for hiring entities and the consumers of interpreting services can vet interpreters and ensure the interpreters they work with are working in settings that matches their level of skill and qualification.

Please vote in support of SB1562.

Thank you for your time,

Vanessa Bishop, NIC, CoreCHI, OCHI Nationally Certified Healthcare Interpreter