

Submitter: Tracy Marsh

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Behavioral Health and Health Care

Measure: HB2696

February 3, 2023

Oregon State Legislature

900 Court St NE

Salem, OR 97301

SUBJECT: Support for HB 2696, the Oregon Sign Language Interpreter Licensure Bill

TO: Chair Nosse, Vice-Chair Goodwin, Vice-Chair Nelson, and members of the Committee

I am writing to urge the Committee to support HB2696.

As a licensed speech-language pathologist now retired from medical settings, I want to express my strong support of licensure for those in the crucial role of sign language interpreter. In my experience in hospitals (in a state where interpreter licensure still isn't required), it was the norm, not the exception, that Deaf patients had to jump through very difficult hoops to secure appropriate interpreter services – all while they were sick or injured. Years later, I'm still hearing the same terrible stories here in Oregon. Professionals in hospitals and other medical settings still do not have a way to ensure that they are using qualified interpreters. The Joint Commission, the organization cited below that accredits inpatient hospitals and other facilities, has made clear that effective communication between patients and providers is vital: "No longer considered to be simply a patient's right, effective communication is now accepted as an essential component of quality care and patient safety."(1), p.2.

Licensure for doctors, nurses, lawyers, therapists of all kinds, and many other professionals is intended to protect the consumer by ensuring the provider's competence. If the consumer is Deaf, and an unqualified interpreter fails to accurately understand or convey information, this creates a huge disconnect between the provider and the consumer. It places the Deaf consumer in the completely unfair position of having to make decisions or heed advice based on an erroneous or incomplete exchange of information – and why should that be? If the provider's skills and knowledge are important enough that they require licensure, isn't ensuring the consumer's ability to interact fully with that provider just as important? Licensure of interpreters is a key step toward mending that disconnect and giving Deaf citizens the

equal access that hearing citizens enjoy.

We can do better in Oregon. Deaf citizens should be just as safe in medical settings as hearing citizens; providers need to know they are using interpreters that are held to similar standards of competence and ethics that they are; hiring entities need a clearly defined pool of qualified and ethical candidates; and interpreters-in-training need the supervision and mentoring that this bill provides. I respectfully ask for your support of HB2696.

Sincerely,

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(1) <https://www.jointcommission.org/-/media/tjc/documents/standards/r3-reports/r3-report-issue-1-20111.pdf>

(2) Additional reading: <https://www.jointcommission.org/-/media/tjc/documents/resources/patient-safety-topics/health-equity/roadmapforhospitalsfinalversion727pdf.pdf?db=web&hash=AC3AC4BED1D973713C2CA6B2E5ACD01B&hash=AC3AC4BED1D973713C2CA6B2E5ACD01B>