Rep. Rob Nosse
House Committee On Behavioral Health and Health Care
900 Court St. NE
Salem, OR 97301

January 27, 2023

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

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

I am writing to urge this Committee to support HB 2696.

The purpose of this letter is to urge this Committee to elevate the provision of interpreting services for individuals who are Deaf and Deaf/Blind by supporting HB2696. I strongly feel this bill will give the much needed change we've been looking for. By we, I mean members of the Deaf communities, more specifically, in rural communities such as mine.

Over the last 10 years, my Deaf husband and I have had 8 rushed visits to the ER. All required the need for immediate surgery and overnight stays. In addition, we had numerous medical follow up appointments and procedures. Naturally, medical related services are anxiety-inducing for anyone, conversely, we are beyond the ordinary anxiety levels because of the repeated hardship in language access. The handful of unqualified interpreters here are misrepresenting themselves as trained interpreters – they are showing up without comprehensive language skills, understanding of medical terminology, the setting or training on ethical boundaries.

I am grieving. This is the 3rd time for me to speak to legislation. It grieves me to think of my peers going through similar inaccessible experiences. I am stuck in this paradox. Over and over, I see strikingly under-qualified 'interpreters' in the medical setting in Central Oregon. I appreciate the good ones - it's the under-qualified ones that need to be stopped, particularly in the medical setting. Many think they are coming to my "rescue" but they are completely wrong. They are causing harm to me, my husband and my community. Their flawed translations end up only providing roughly 30% of the spoken content. Because of them, I miss 70% of information on my health, including explanations of procedures, risks and benefits, diagnosis and more. They end up controlling what information is delivered to me, instead of making all information accessible, they are denying me access to make informed decisions about my health.

These imposters aren't trained. These imposters do not have any certifications. These imposters aren't properly educated or ethical. They are disregarding my rights and my husband's rights to equal communication.

This past Fall my husband got injured, while it wasn't life-threatening I dropped to my knees and grieved because I was overwhelmed by the anxiety of once again having to navigate the inaccessibilities to information. I dread the confusion, and having to decipher how limited and inaccurate the information is that is given by these imposters. These imposters are hurting the Deaf communities. When they poorly interpret, yet exude a false confidence that gives the doctor the impression that we're the hurdle, that we're the oblivious one - not them. We go through this time and time again, and it has to stop. I can only imagine what it may be like for my deaf peers who do not have the privileges I have.

It has been demoralizing with the masks (which hinders essential information for the deaf) and on top of that, the continued abuse by unqualified and unethical 'interpreters'. This repeated experience is upsetting. We are traumatized, deflated, and exhausted. I'm stuck in this paradox. These imposters cannot be trusted to accurately assess their skill level and abilities, nor follow the interpreter code of ethics. These people are oppressors. We literally live with constant worry about the next time a medical emergency arises.

We have no venue to report these imposters, there's no way for us to hold these people accountable. We have no power. This is my health care. This is my life. This is my husband's life. It's our lives.

My husband regularly renews his construction license every 2 years. There isn't a standard like this for interpreters, but this bill can change that and protect the lives of Deaf people in Oregon. My husband and I are only two of over 1 million individuals living with hearing loss in the state of Oregon. I'm saddened because I know we aren't alone in these experiences. There are thousands of others that share similar experiences to ours. It is time for accountability. I want the peace of mind knowing that when my husband and I show up for a medical situation, we will have a competent, qualified interpreter that we can trust.

I respectfully ask you to watch Paradox, a 4 minute clip that dives into some of our lived experiences. With your support of HB2696 the Oregon Sign Language Interpreter Licensure Bill, you have the power to get us out of this paradox.

Respectfully,

Cara Frank
Deaf Advocate
Deschutes County