

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.

My name is Melissa R. Smith and I am a Sign Language interpreter working in Oregon. I am writing to urge the Committee's support of HB 2696. This bill will protect the more than 180,000 Deaf, DeafBlind, 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, DeafBlind, 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.

HB 2696 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. This bill will save hiring entities money as well by getting a qualified interpreter the first time to mitigate misunderstanding and miscommunication. I have personally showed up to medical appointments to interpret to find that the doctor has to review everything from a past appointment because the interpreter used previously was not qualified. This time could have been better used to address new problems or to tweak the current care plan.

I respectfully ask for the Committee's support of HB2696 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,
Melissa R. Smith NIC, CoreCHI, OCHI
Interpreter
Wilsonville, Oregon