

Dear Chair Patterson, Vice Chair Hayden and members of the committee,

My name is Estefany Dieguez, I live in the Portland metro area. I have been interpreting for a total of 11 years. I started when I was in high school by teaching Spanish at the International School in downtown Portland. After high school I started volunteering as an interpreter with Compassion Connect and AMEN these are organizations that provide free Dental/Vision/Medical as well as other resources to communities in need. I professionally started interpreting in 2018 when I felt that my skills would be a greater asset helping the community, in the recent year I have dedicate full-time to interpret professionally with the goal of pursuing this line of work as my long term profession.

I grew up low-income. Going to churches during summer in search of school supplies and food pantries during the week so we could have food at the table. My mom worked multiple jobs at a time. Once I knew English it was up to my brother and I to make all the necessary phone calls that required English. Phone bill, electricity bill, water, gas, doctors visit, being only 8 years old.

This is why I decided to do Full time interpreting. I see many kids go with their parent and parents tell me that their kids is useless or the opposite where the kids and the parent are both relieved that there is someone else to help them navigate their healthcare needs. Some of these patients are too scared to advocate for their needs they feel a burden that they may anger the doctor or that they will be seen as stupid for not knowing how to read or write. Some are so scared to be seen as poor and receive wrongful treatment be judge for asking. I once did an oncology appointment where It was evident that the patient had a tumor and the doctor confirmed it. The patient already knew and the doctor asked why they wait so long. The patients next words were "I do not have the money, I cant afford treatment. I am scared to burden my family". So many Hispanic/Latino families struggle with their healthcare needs due to the burden of not having health insurance/the ability to find the resources to help them. Right there not only did the doctor educate the patient on their in house financial assistant plan that would cover their medication expenses 100% but also about a state program that covers medication, doctors visits and any procedures without the need of a Social security number. This patient cried they sobs of relief touched my heart because experiencing this first hand I know how relieving it can be to be told "its going to be okay".

I came here to support SB 548. I cannot continue to do what I do because it is getting more difficult, even as a full-time interpreter, to work and live a livable wage. I want to help the community but I sacrifice health insurance unless I work a W-4 type of job. I am under DACA and as a recipient, not sure if many of you know, we are not allowed to purchase our own health insurance via market place but only have it via employer [(Exception: Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) is not an eligible immigration status for applying for health insurance)]. Many agencies will not pay mileage reimbursement and when they do they take half the pay for themselves. I don't get paid for my travel time and I get asked to do work that I am not suppose to do reason being, I don't get paid for it.

I am pregnant right now. I tried to work for a company as a W-2 interpreter and as soon as I told them I was pregnant and needed to be off early for doctors visit, even though I followed protocol and let all parties know as well as gave documentation of my upcoming appointment with 2 weeks in advance, I was not given the time to go to my appointment. When the third time came around that I reschedule my prenatal visit I kept on letting my supervisor know that I was going to be leaving exactly at 5pm. As that was the time that my schedule was supposed to be 8-5pm. My schedule had showed there was an appointment for 4:30 for an hour. I was told I didn't communicate, even though I had all the documentation via email. They changed my whole schedule that day to start work at 5:30 am and still end my day at 4:30. I was extremely upset. I was disappointed and I quit. I could not prolong my prenatal visits just for a companies greed to have a Qualified interpreter to cover their appointment. I was being used like a mule. With no regards to my health not the child that I am expecting. This experience made me want to quit interpreting as my profession all together but I keep going because of the difference I know I make in these patients life.

Now that I have set to work as a contractor, I get emails from agencies. They ask for my rates. I let them know and they always come back saying they cannot do it and would be willing to pay me xx much. I always reply back letting them know that is unfortunate and I hope they can find someone else. I do this because of the following. I have learned that my skills are extremely valuable. I put a lot of studying and effort in my ability to interpret, this is what agencies are trying to find and retain but I also know that they get paid well. Which brings me to the following. These agencies reply to me back after I send them that and tell me they can in fact pay me what I had stated in the first email of my rates and that they can pay me a 2-hour minimum. So, my question is, why loop around and lie to me. An agency that lies does not have the best interest of any contractor nor the patient but themselves. It is greed for wealth that drives the company. The lack of transparency allows these agencies to pay interpreters at such a low rate.

Think about this. I worked for a company that paid \$20 per appointment. No mileage reimbursement nor bonuses. Of those \$20 I have to account for gas and the taxes that will be taken from them. Essentially, I would be going in to work for roughly \$10-15 per appointment. That for an interpreter is working for free, it does not pay the bills and it doesn't even help to cover any health insurance.

Now what can be done to help solve some these issues and keep interpreters from experiencing these types of situation. Create an online portal one specific where interpreter can work directly with providers/Coordinator Care Organization to not only cover the appointments for LEP in need but also to get paid a livable wage were. Not only can this help cut off the administrative cost of working with a third-party agency, but it would help the state know where and how much exactly is being used for language services. Real data to show where the money is being spent and how it is being spent and how much is being given to the interpreter. But most importantly this portal would be primarily used by Qualified/Certified Interpreters to bring highly skilled interpreter to the most vulnerable of communities obtain accurate and quality services in a respectful and culturally sensitive manner.