

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

My name is Sandra Valdez, I am a certified medical interpreter since 2009 I have worked during this time in the state of Oregon.

I decided to be an interpreter because I saw the need among my community to be understood and served with dignity. I saw people's frustration at not understanding the language and not asking for services for fear of being ignored. I have seen people in my community and other communities who have limited education and many of them need spoken interpretation in remote languages/dialects in their region, many of these people continue to use their children as interpreters due to the lack of interpreters prepared for the services needed. The medical and health insurance system is very complex to understand for people from communities that do not easily read technical forms, the prepared interpreters constantly assist interpreting also official documents.

As an interpreter I have seen the need to go to remote places to offer medical and educational services to people who hardly leave their work areas to attend to their health. Not that it is relevant, but they prefer to work than a doctor. Even so, they are offered vaccination and preventive medical services which they could not understand except in their own language.

Being an interpreter requires preparation, education, and dedication and commitment to continuing education. I, Sandra Valdez love my profession and meet the necessary requirements to be considered a Certified and professional Interpreter. Since the first certification I obtained in 2009 I believed that the profession of interpreters would be a respected and honored profession as a profession. But over the years I have been disappointed by the lack of dedication that work organizations as agencies provide to interpreters. By not offering any health insurance solution for interpreters, it gives us the opportunity to search for jobs with benefits.

The freelance interpreter has no secure job, not even for a day. Today there are 2 hours of work, tomorrow 1 hour, the next day 6 hours and the next there are no hours. For this reason, I have to offer my services to several contracting agencies. Each of the agencies regardless of the region pays different rates. As a certified interpreter they offer me \$2.00 more compared to non-certified interpreters. BUT they only call me from time to time to work, because I know they prefer to offer working hours to interpreters who earn less money per hour. As I interpret, I drive long distances of road and most of the time the number of miles driven are not refunded. If I ask the agency for reimbursement, I risk not being called to work for a couple of days. I feel it as punishment. But it's favoritism, which doesn't motivate me to stay as an interpreter. What I make been an interpret, and income insecurity does not compensate for the daily worrisome. How I could motivate other interpreters to stay on the same path. It's impossible. Interpreters are needed, there will always be people with language limitations, and it is not possible for the state so far to be putting money funds in the wrong place.

I have heard from medical providers and staff complaining about interpreters being poorly or not at all prepared for interpretation. I have seen the lack of professionalism among non-certified interpreters, and it is a pity that I have had to prepare myself and continue with my education to remain certified when there are interpreters who do not take seriously, they worked and only take it as an opportunity to earn money. The agencies hire bilingual people and without preparing them, they get send out to interpret, both parties earn money. The state pays that money,

I have had countless colleagues and interpreter friends who have chosen to look for different jobs. As interpreters they did not have the confidence to seek certification because of the insecurity they obtained from the contracting agencies. Unstable working hours, emotional and physical support does not exist, continuous education you seek for yourself. Hourly pay does not compensate for long driving distances or wear and tear on the car.

As a solution:

I support SB 584.

It gives me personally, the assurance that the profession will be taken seriously and respected as it deserves.

Establishing a system that provides stability and equality to interpreters for both paid and working hours without favoritism will attract more people who want to be certified for good.

Provide better continuing education opportunities for interpreters

It will also give security to the providers to search and locate the interpreter with the required skills.

It will give security to the state by knowing what the money of funds is spent on.

By removing middlemen – agencies – the money is used to offer more services that the community needs.

I continue to be an interpreter to continue advocating for the profession. Being an interpreter requires skills and education that are not easily achieved and must be considered to be respected. Interpreters have the respect of the community because they feel served by receiving their services. But we, the interpreters, require respect from the contracting agencies and the state too.

Certifying more interpreters, so providers will feel confident when working with interpreters, that how the profession gains respect.

Thank you.