

The Honorable Rev. Dr. Deb Patterson
Chair, Oregon State Senate Committee on Health Care

The Honorable Cedric Hayden
Vice Chair, Oregon State Senate Committee on Health Care

Dear Senator Patterson and Senator Hayden,

My name is Rosa Hilts, I am an Oregon-based healthcare Spanish interpreter. I write to express serious concerns about Oregon Senate Bill 584. This bill would require the Oregon Health Authority (OHA) to develop a web-based platform to support the scheduling and payment of interpreters for language access for Oregon health care patients. I oppose this bill because it threatens to make my life as an independent contractor much more difficult.

Nationally, more than 80% of interpreters and translators work as Independent Contractors (ICs). As an IC, I set my hours – I can accept or refuse assignments according to my schedule. This is an enormous advantage to those of us who have child or eldercare responsibilities, for example. I set my rates, and can negotiate rates with my clients. For each of the companies I work with, I had to demonstrate my skills and qualifications, including taking their tests, which in many cases are harder than the national certification tests offered in health care by CCHI and IMIA.

I have been Qualified and Certified since 2014 and I'm currently in the process of recertification. I have worked remotely since I was diagnosed with a debilitating health issue that stops me from working on site. I am grateful to agencies like CLI (I have worked with them for over a decade, after OHSU decided to eliminate their Interpreter Services Department) that have provided me with the opportunity to work with local Hospitals and Health centers in Oregon but also, and mostly with Health Care Facilities outside of Oregon.

Having the Oregon Health Authority replace the many language companies working in Oregon will make my life more challenging. Instead of being on the “rolodex” of several companies, which makes it possible to fill my schedule out, I will be dependent on one client to provide assignments in Oregon. The bill also does not clarify how rates will be set, or who sets them.

Senate Bill 584 is trying to provide language access to patients that already exist. I am concerned that services won't be provided 24/7/365 in a timely manner; therefore, health care providers and patients will experience long delays for immediate assistance in possible life threatening situations. What about languages of lesser diffusion? Would the portal be able to utilize Language Line Services for such needs? Would the team of twenty-three cross-organizational individuals to design the website include actual Certified/Qualified Medical Interpreters? If not, I strongly believe they should be part of this selective group.

Finally, this is not just a database to provide revenue and expenditure feedback. It's not just about language access to the LEP either, but SB584 makes me feel very skeptical about the monumental task this Portal would face with such major liabilities, involving life and death decisions.

Language access in health care in Oregon could be improved, but this bill isn't the way to do it.

Respectfully,

Rosa Hilts