

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

Subject: Opposition to Senate Bill 584

Dear Senator Patterson and Senator Hayden,

I am writing to you on behalf of my business, Lloyd Central Compounding Pharmacy, to express opposition to Oregon Senate Bill 584. I support the idea of reducing the rates of health care interpreters, but this bill is inadequate and will result in reduced access to critical health interpreters.

In my pharmacy, I employ over 40 employees, we work with over 10,000 doctors and serve over 50,000 patients. We offer health care interpreters to our patients that need support, utilizing third party companies to handle any language that our staff cannot interpret ourselves.

Because we cannot predict when we will be needing language interpretation services, we require interpretation services that are flexible and can be accessed near-immediately. SB 584 would make this impossible, by requiring a government agency become involved in all scheduling, and limiting the number of available interpreters. I have no confidence that the government agency will be able to provide interpretation scheduling in near-real time. This will add a significant burden on our staff to coordinate when we can obtain interpretation services, and any delay in scheduling will result in many patients in need simply not getting an interpreter at all. This will be a serious health detriment to our patients that often have the most need.

And let's be real. This federal mandate is unfunded and its implementation is complex. It will not meet the intended goal of the bill, which is to increase access to interpretation services. Put simply, an underfunded government program is not up to the task to hire, manage and schedule interpreters in over 150 languages. We've had a lot of success using our third party interpretation service and they are available whenever we need, even if that need is "right now." They have been affordable for us.

The allocation of funds in this bill to the Oregon Health Authority would not cover these essential functions, and would only provide a fraction of what healthcare providers and language companies already spend on language access. For example, there is a shortage of Oregon-qualified health care interpreters, with only 1,000 available in less than 25 languages, primarily serving the Portland area. This bill will have an unintended consequence of limiting access because we simply do not have enough interpreters that meet the bill's requirements.

We understand how important it is to provide interpretation services to all patients, and we take our role responsibility in this area seriously. This bill would not relieve us of this liability and would instead make the Oregon Health Authority liable for language access. And the OHA can't handle this task given the resources and requirements imposed by this bill.

Given the complex nature of this issue and the far-reaching implications of this bill, we are strongly opposed to this bill and think it should be shelved or heavily modified. Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

Sincerely,
Adam Gustafson, PhD
Lloyd Central Compounding Pharmacy