

February 10, 2023

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,

As a long-time healthcare interpreter, trainer and language access advocate, I am writing to **oppose** 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 Oregonian health care patients. The intentions are well-meaning, but completely divorced from the reality of how healthcare interpreting is delivered to patients and providers and the likely consequences will be far more harmful than healing.

The bill hopes to improve working conditions and wages for healthcare interpreters but limits its impact to a tiny fraction of the healthcare interpreters who actually provide services in Oregon. It will immediately risk limiting immigrant communities' language access and put continued stress on the wages and work opportunities for those interpreters who do not work onsite, which is most interpreters.

In short, the bill as written will likely result in negative consequences for Oregonian patients due to the OHA's lack of funding, insufficient language coverage, and lack of remote interpretation capabilities.

I have tracked healthcare interpreting trends nationwide for 3 decades. I have also provided long-term consulting and training to indigenous interpreters and many healthcare interpreters and trainers in the state of Oregon. There is an unfortunate trend in well-meaning but misguided state legislation that fails to recognize the fundamental structure of the interpreting workforce nationwide. This bill suffers from the same flaws.

Bill 584 assumes that onsite interpreters can be legislated in isolation from remote interpreters. This is simply not possible. No matter which state you are in, the majority of healthcare interpreting is provided through remote over the phone and video remote interpretation. There is a chronic shortage of healthcare interpreters across the board and each state relies on a national network of interpreters who can cover the more than 300 languages that require interpretation. No single state has enough state-based interpreters to cover the federal and state mandated language access rights of its Limited English Proficient immigrant and Deaf and Hard of Hearing communities.

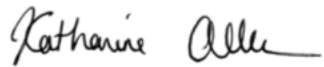
This legislation will take Oregon backwards in the hard work it has invested in expanding meaningful language access to some of its most vulnerable residents. It further exacerbates what is already a problematic wage difference between onsite and remote interpreters, by privileging

onsite over remote. It provides no language or guidance for how to guarantee that in the case an onsite interpreter is not available, a qualified, vetted professional remote interpreter is tapped to fill in. As a result, it opens the door for unqualified and unvetted interpreters to accept work. Real providers and patients will suffer the consequences of not being able to provide critical healthcare services.

I urge this body to take into account the complexities and realities of healthcare interpreting and what it takes to successfully provide meaningful language access – which translates into better health outcomes for thousands of Oregon residents.

This bill, as written, will not achieve its intended purpose. I ask you to oppose Bill 584 and its amendments in its current form.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Katharine Allen". The signature is written in a cursive style with a clear, legible font.

Katharine Allen

Owner

Words Across Borders

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