

February 16, 2023

To the Honorable:

Chair Patterson
Vice Chair Hayden
members of the committee

My name is Jerry Menchu and I am an Oregon Qualified Health Care Interpreter and my HCI registered number is HCI 000010021 and I am writing in support of HB 584.

Frankly, interpreting agencies are not necessary and should be viewed as a convenience for some but not a necessity.

There was a time in the past when interpreting agencies would train the bilingual independent contractor in order to serve as an interpreter for its clients being paid by the private sector such as hospitals, clinics etc., around Oregon. Back then, the agency would send a sales representative to speak with their future clients and then every 3 to 5 years the hospitals would decide to either keep working with the agency or perform a bidding and decide what interpreting agency would be more convenient for the next period. Usually, the new interpreting agency would strike a deal where it would promise to bundle all languages in a fixed price per the hour and the pitch would be that if the hospital, clinic etc., would use other agencies or interpreters etc., then besides breaching the contract, it would no longer be able to keep up the low prices in the agreement per amount of services per month. Besides all of this, the agencies would also use its platform and if the interpreter would cause harm, then it would be the agency who could suffer the consequences in losing its investment in training interpreters and office personnel etc.

Under the above model, one can say that the agencies had the right to claim the bilingual workers as their creation and therefore get paid accordingly.

However today the above model is no longer practiced. Now in days, the interpreter owns his/her profession by becoming an Oregon Health care Interpreter and in accordance to the Oregon Health Authority/Office of Equity and Inclusion, to even entertain the notion in becoming an HCI, one has to be 100% fluent in both languages and in oral communication and in writing and the Authority does test one's ability. So, we are not bilingual but fluent and there is a big difference.

NOTE: According to the Defense Language Institute ("DLI") United States Department of Defense (DoD) educational and research institution which provides linguistic and cultural instruction to the Department of Defense and to other federal agencies and to numerous customers around the world please visit: "www.dliflc.edu/" or Google: "*Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center*" for the institute it would take at least 5 hours a day, 5 days a week for 36 weeks to accomplish learning Spanish with proficiency and not to mention that it is well known fact that for every hour of study it is required two hours of practice.

Because language courses are expensive then this is the reason that for example the military offers interpreters an annual special pay of up to \$12,000 a year for a 4- year recruitment to servicemembers

who are proficient in foreign languages. please visit: www.military.com/join-armed-forces/career-spotlight-translators.html.

Besides the above, one must get trained as in OAR 333-002-0060.

The Agencies do not train the interpreter anymore and instead rely on the interpreters “paid by their own pocket training” to offer a good quality of service. Also, interpreting agencies rely on federal grant money handed down by the United States Department of Health and Human Services and through the Oregon health Authority are paid by CareOregon, Pacific Source, Medicare, Medicaid etc., and get a fixed hourly payment and so, no longer striving for private biddings as in the past because they are being paid directly from the source.

So, what is the role of interpreting agencies these days?

The only thing I can think of is using their platform in order for the interpreter to download its appointments offered by federal grant money, (this could be achieved through the Oregon Registry with regards to the HCI interpreters) and organize the appointments forms and bill the state through the above mentioned departments, so, basically acting as a broker system but without striving for clientele as it used to do in the past because the state programs provide the clients.

All the above, the Health Care Interpreter can do, I suspect that there will be those who still will prefer to work with interpreting agencies, but I say the State should allow for independent contractors to be able to compete with other interpreting agencies, I see nothing but a win, win situation.

Besides, the State of Oregon must be careful in not aiding and abetting any violation to the federal and state Antitrust laws. (Interpreters or interpreter agencies are not yet connected to the state of Oregon CCO system and therefore unshielded from these laws.

The Agencies are making very good money at the expense of the interpreters training and the only thing I see, is there ability in billing the state for their services, let’s give the HCI interpreters the respect they deserve and allow for them to own what is theirs.

Jerry Menchu
In his support of HB 584
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