



Re: SB 1578, Oregon Healthcare Interpreter Reform

Chair Patterson, Vice-Chair Hayden, and members of the committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in strong support of SB 1578, Oregon Healthcare Interpreter Reform. My name is Jenny Lee, and I am the Deputy Director at the Coalition of Communities of Color (CCC), an alliance of culturally specific community-based organizations. Our mission includes addressing the socioeconomic disparities experienced by individuals, families, and communities of color; and to engage in collective action for social change to obtain self-determination, wellness, justice, and prosperity.

In Oregon, the majority of healthcare interpreters tend to be independent contractors that work for many for-profit language service companies across the state. These for-profit language service companies can have practices that negatively impact interpreters, such as taking 40–60 percent off the top of the interpreter’s contracts for administrative costs, leaving the interpreters with little financial return.

This issue is important to CCC and our member organization leading this legislation, Unite Oregon, since the communities that tend to need access to interpretation are some of the most vulnerable within our healthcare system, including communities of color, immigrants, and refugees. Additionally, many of the interpreters themselves are people of color, immigrants, and refugees as well.

To help remedy the circumstances that healthcare interpreters face, Unite Oregon and Oregon AFSCME have proposed to create a Trust with the state government to jointly manage and maintain a portal for health care providers, providing access to an online scheduling portal for Medicaid appointments where interpretation services are necessary. This would help to cut out for-profit language companies and use the state dollars that are currently being invested into interpretation services to be directly given to interpreters themselves.

The portal would also help to collect data for Medicaid reimbursements. The second key element of this policy directs the Oregon Health Authority to apply to 1115 waiver. Under 1115 authority, states may receive approval to waive some requirements of their Medicaid or CHIP state plans to test new approaches to paying for and delivering covered services and defining or limiting benefit packages. Oregon's initial 1115 Medicaid Demonstration waiver established the original groundbreaking Oregon Health Plan (OHP) in 1994. Since then, the Demonstration has given Oregon numerous opportunities to expand and improve health care throughout the state.

Currently, interpreters get a \$60 flat rate fee for Medicaid as their reimbursement per hour. This policy creates a pathway for healthcare interpreters to become Medicaid providers themselves, which would help to change the pay structure of how healthcare interpreters are able to receive funding. It would get rid of the \$60 flat rate fee for Medicaid reimbursement and shift it to a

percentage match based on the state dollars that are already being used for interpretation services to fill Medicaid appointments.

On behalf of the Coalition of Communities of Color, I urge you to support this legislation to improve the working conditions of healthcare interpreters and streamline how Oregonians can access these crucial services.

Thank you,

Jenny Lee  
Deputy Director  
Coalition of Communities of Color