

To: Senate Committee on Health Care
From: Antonio Saenz, Oregon Interpreters in Action
Re: Support for Statewide Health Care Interpreter Portal

Dear Chair Patterson, Vice-Chair Hayden, and members of the Committee,

My name is Antonio Saenz and I have been interpreting in Spanish for 20 years. I actually love working in the medical field and helping people to express their pains and needs clearly. It is very rewarding to me when I see patients who have been able to accurately convey their needs and to understand what they can do next for relief. I have had way too many patients who have told me about bad experiences they have had at the doctor's office because of inaccurate interpreting services.

Right now, the demand for Spanish interpreting services is greater than anyone can even imagine, but it is somehow harder to get consistent appointments as a certified interpreter. Agencies take advantage of the current system and underpay skilled interpreters while also giving the most appointments to people who are not certified and aren't competent in health care interpreting because they can pay them even less.

We can't afford to buy health insurance, let alone continue to pay for our certifications. Our continuing education can only be done at accredited schools, and we have to pay for that, too. This field has a 75% attrition rate because people can't make a living doing this work, so they leave to other jobs that pay.

The way we do things right now is totally disorganized, and disrespectful to the work that interpreters do. It also does not give patients the care they deserve. I know of many occasions when there was a need for an experienced interpreter for a specific field, and agencies have just sent whoever, without any care for how it might impact the patient.

Washington state has already developed a model for scheduling and paying certified interpreters, and it's working. Oregon needs to follow this lead to ensure better care for patients and better pay for interpreters who want to develop this job into a long-term career.