

To: Senate Committee on Health Care  
From: Daniel Solomon, 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 Daniel Solomon and I have been a certified health care interpreter in Amharic and Tigrinya for 26 years. I don't have enough words to say how much this work means to me. The main reason I do it is to help my community, especially elderly people who are in need of medical interpreting. Because of the lack of language proficiency in English, I have personally witnessed many people cancel appointments that they needed to take care of themselves.

When I am there to provide my services, the medical staff and especially the patients are so appreciative and happy that they have someone representing them. I have worked with patients who have not had an interpreter, or who have had an incompetent interpreter, and they inform me right away. They complain that their interpreter missed a lot of information, and they didn't understand everything because of this. The patients lose trust, and they might not continue to get the care they need.

Qualified interpreters care for the patients and we are grateful to work alongside kind medical staff, but the language agencies don't seem to care for us or for the patients. They don't pay us enough, and they don't offer us consistent hours. I have accepted job offers, traveled to the job which I was excited to do, and gotten to the appointment to find that it has been canceled. I have accepted offers for four-hour jobs, which have gotten canceled at the last minute, and I only get paid for one hour. And the agencies refuse to pay us for travel time.

I have asked for a raise, gotten a small one three weeks later, and then suddenly, I stop getting appointments. It feels like the agency is punishing me for requesting more money and it is very sad.

I hope that we can get a system for scheduling and payment through the state, because then we would get paid what we deserve and be able to serve more patients. It would give me motivation to continue working in this field.