

To: Senate Committee on Health Care
From: David Torres, 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 David Torres, and I've been a Spanish health care interpreter for 13 years. I became an interpreter in the healthcare field because I wanted to make a difference and contribute to my community by helping non English-speaking patients. In addition I also enjoy helping medical providers bridge the communication gaps in the healthcare industry, it's a very rewarding profession. It's a very good feeling to know that I'm making a positive impact. I enjoy helping patients feel more at ease during medical appointments, which can already be very stressful and scary for them.

I worked with a mother of a child in the blood disorders department and when I introduced myself as a Spanish health care interpreter, the mother of the patient said to me, "I hope you are not like the last interpreter. I speak English, but when it comes to my son's health I want to make sure I understand everything that is being said." The last interpreter did not know the complex medical terminology and he was asking the patient what the doctor was saying. The provider happened to be bilingual in Spanish and was very upset about the quality of the interpretation, so he asked them to leave. It impacts patients and medical providers tremendously not to be able to communicate in the same language, which is why certified interpreters are so important.

I think interpreters get discouraged because interpretation agencies don't appreciate our work. It feels like they are simply in it as a money-making venture; they only care about profit margins. They don't pay well or offer benefits like health insurance or a 401k, and they don't respect our time. Interpreters eventually get fed up and look for other employment opportunities, thus letting their credentials lapse and leaving fewer qualified people in the field.

As a certified health care interpreter, I would love to be treated like I'm a professional and be compensated for my services accordingly. Having a statewide system that would connect me directly with patients so that I can earn a fair wage would be huge. I would be so grateful to be able to help as many patients as I can on a daily basis. It would help us to be able to provide for our families and would also encourage other interpreters to become qualified.