

To: Senate Committee on Health Care
From: Mark Hedinger, 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 Mark Hedinger and I have been a Spanish health care interpreter for 6 years. Facing health issues is one of life's most vulnerable moments, and so much harder when you can't get care in your own language. I faced medical issues years ago living in Mexico, and a kind bilingual neighbor was there for me. Now I want to be that same good neighbor in my community.

Once, I was working with a young mom who was in need of medical care for her toddler. The natural worries of parents were amplified by lack of English proficiency. As I interpreted for the patient and the provider, she was able to both express the child's symptoms and hear the doctor's replies. It is hard to describe how she almost visibly relaxed from being able to communicate through an interpreter.

When providers and patients do not understand each other, it leads to negative and even dangerous situations. Patients might be reluctant to share all their symptoms, which can lead to a wrong diagnosis and that can have serious consequences.

I love doing this work because I am fine with only interpreting as a part-time job, but if I were trying to support myself or my family, it would be practically impossible with the current system. Maintaining credentials for a job that doesn't pay enough to meet a family's needs would be one big reason why people drop out of the system and do not renew their credentials. I know at least half a dozen "used to be" interpreters.

I currently work for two companies, and scheduling is a limiting factor because of the way that the apps broadcast appointment offers which are normally snatched up within seconds. I literally cannot check my own availability before the appointments are taken. This leaves me interpreting maybe 3 or 4 appointments per week. A more accessible appointment system would allow me to take more appointments.

The two companies I work for pay different rates. Even though I am technically self-employed as a contractor, I am paid according to the company policies and I have very little knowledge of how much those companies are being paid for the work I do. Often the reason we are with one company or another is because of the geography of where we live compared to where they have contracts. Moving to a centralized state-wide system would level out pay regardless of where we live. That is a win for patients, and a win for interpreters, and I suspect an overall win for the State, too.