

To: Senate Committee on Health Care
From: Shayma Ahmad, 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 Shayma Ahmad and I have been an Arabic and Kurdish interpreter for over 14 years. I love bridging the gap between patients and medical providers and breaking down the language barriers, because all patients should have equal access to quality healthcare services. This work that we do offers a sense of purpose and meaning because we know that patients are receiving quality care and that their lives matter.

Without a certified medical interpreter, we see a lot of preventable medical errors. Patients have longer stays at hospitals, which means higher treatment costs. It also increases the disparity in the level of care that patients who do not speak English get.

I have worked with patients who have learned that they didn't follow the right instructions for her medication because the interpreter gave them the wrong information. Other times I have seen patients who have received the wrong diagnosis because an interpreter wasn't trained or qualified in medical care. It is embarrassing to us as interpreters to hear that other interpreters in the field provide lower quality interpretation because our job is a huge responsibility.

Because there isn't a centralized health care interpreting system, we have to go through language interpreting agencies to get work. We don't get paid much, and we have to be more selective about appointments because we don't get paid for transportation. If we could get appointments directly from the state, we could make better pay and be able to take more appointments.