

Submitter: Robin Fouche

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Senate Committee On Health Care

Measure: SB1578

Subject: Opposition to SB 1578: Ensuring Equitable Language Access in Healthcare

Dear Chair Patterson, Vice Chair Hayden, and Members of the Oregon Senate Committee on Health Care,

As the Director of Client Relations at Linguava Interpreters, I am writing to express my opposition to Senate Bill 1578. While we commend the bill's intent, I believe it is fundamentally flawed and could have adverse effects on language access in healthcare for Limited English Proficient (LEP) patients. Here are some key concerns:

1. **Limited Reach:** SB 1578 primarily benefits a few hundred Spanish and ASL onsite interpreters, neglecting the broader spectrum of languages spoken by LEP patients across Oregon.
2. **Inaccurate Data:** The rationale behind SB 1578, citing only 5% qualified or certified interpreter coverage for medical appointments, contradicts our data, which shows a significantly higher utilization rate of over 85% of medical appointments covered by interpreters registered on the Oregon Health Authority (OHA) interpreter registry.
3. **Portal Limitations:** The proposed scheduling portal under SB 1578 raises concerns about language access for LEP patients by limiting language options to interpreters registered with OHA, representing only a third of the languages we cover.
4. **Hurdles for Providers:** SB 1578 creates logistical hurdles for healthcare providers, especially those in rural areas, by bifurcating systems based on interpreter registration and failing to address language needs in underserved regions.
5. **Unrepresented Languages:** The bill fails to address the needs of patients speaking unrepresented languages, raising concerns about patient care.

Arguments in support have stated that, "Supporting SB 1578 is a commitment to the well-being and equitable treatment of all, regardless of their linguistic background." I disagree wholeheartedly and will counter that SB 1578 creates barriers for patients based completely on their linguistic background, or National Origin.

By limiting language options and not prioritizing the needs of LEP patients, the bill

runs counter to the principles of equitable healthcare, jeopardizing the quality of care for a substantial portion of our community. Is the state of Oregon willing to assume the responsibility and risk for the patients who speak unrepresented languages and do not receive services? How do those risks affect patient care and provider efficacy.

In conclusion, I urge you to oppose SB 1578 to ensure equitable language access in healthcare for all Oregonians. Thank you for considering this perspective on this important issue.

Sincerely,
Robin Fouché
Director of Client Relations
Linguava Interpreters