



Testimony in Support of SB 1578

Metzin Rodriguez, Unite Oregon

February 7, 2024

Chair Patterson, Vice Chair Hayden, and members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Senate Bill 1578. My name is Metzlin Rodriguez and I am a Policy Coordinator at Unite Oregon. An organization led by people of color, immigrants and refugees, rural communities, and people experiencing poverty. Today I am representing our members across the state, more specifically those with limited-English proficiency and their interpreters.

Language access and equity are our top priorities when addressing healthcare systemic issues as an organization that prioritizes multilingual communities. Our efforts include Outreach Interpreters with cultural ties to language-specific communities, materials in our top three languages with the option to request others, and interpreters at all requested events and informational materials. We also work within our communities to provide resources and opportunities for wealth-building to historically excluded communities, including healthcare resources and wellness.

Like many in our membership, I am the daughter of two Mexican immigrant parents. I am a bilingual woman of color, with English being my second language. At times I felt like my voice had a chain around it, limiting my ability to express myself and not being able to explain to the doctor if I was sick. Even when becoming fluent, my credibility was sometimes questioned due to my accent. Since experiencing those circumstances, I made it my goal to improve language access for my Limited English Proficiency communities.

Unfortunately, the reality is that interpreter services are different in every part of Oregon. For instance, there are sometimes very limited interpreters and availability in my coastal town of Coos Bay. My grandpa, who has diabetes, had to delay his appointments until someone from our family could interpret at his doctor appointments because of a lack of interpreters. Our



interpreters need to be retained. Many are turning to other jobs because of low wages, no benefits, not even for healthcare, and lack workforce support.

We need legislation like Senate Bill 1578 so that we can:

- Increase the number of qualified and credentialed interpreters to meet the high healthcare interpretation demand
- Guarantee greater pay and benefits for interpreters to reach our statewide health equity goals
- Increase retention and language accessibility in health care interpretation
- Provide a transparent and easy to use portal for interpreters and providers to use across the state

Mi comunidad les urge que pasen esta legislación. My community urges you to pass this legislation. Are you committed to creating sustainable platforms and evolving with time?

Thank you,

*Metzin Rodriguez (She/her)*

*Policy Coordinator, Unite Oregon*