

Dear Chair Patterson, Vice Chair Hayden, and members of the committee,

My name is David Torres, and I have been working as a health care interpreter in the Portland Oregon and SW areas for 13 years. Many of our State's most vulnerable patients are those whose primary language is not English. For those people and their providers, the success of our healthcare system rests squarely in the hands of interpreters. We work elbow-to-elbow with medical providers in the exam rooms, the ER, the operating room, home hospice, Cardiology, Chemotherapy, births, and deaths. However, in my interpreting career, I've experienced low wages no benefits which makes it difficult to stay in the industry. I write this testimony in hopes you will vote YES on SB 1578.

Oregon has established health equity goals, and a major problem in achieving those goals is that the vast majority of Medicaid and other state-funded appointments are served by unqualified interpreters and/or bilingual individuals with inadequate training. The largest interpreting service companies do not negotiate reasonable rates with interpreters nor ensure OHA-credentialed interpreters are sent to Medicaid appointments.

This means:

- Interpreters cannot afford the cost of ongoing training and certification
- High industry turnover
- Patients and providers are often served by well-meaning but inadequately trained individuals
- The state pays more than necessary due to errors in communication, misdiagnoses, repeat appointments, no-shows, etc.

Supporting SB 1578 will move the State toward greater health equity and save money:

- A scheduling and payment system that allows for direct contact with interpreters will reduce State spending on third-party scheduling companies while allowing interpreters to earn living wages
- Interpreters will be able to invest in ongoing training and certification, professionalizing the industry while providing greater access to quality health care to the State's most vulnerable populations
- Pairing Providers with qualified interpreters for state-funded appointments means less guesswork, fewer unnecessary tests being ordered "just in case," greater patient compliance, and fewer no-shows (all of which cost the State money).

The success of reaching Oregon's health equity goals relies on Oregon's interpreters. SB 1578 will be a meaningful step in improving working conditions for interpreters and, thus, the quality of language access services and health outcomes for Medicaid patients. I appreciate your thoughtful consideration and urge you to vote "YES" on SB 1578

Sincerely,

David Torres