

Submitter: Laurie Harrison
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Health Care
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB950

3/11/25

Re: Support the Oregon Sign Language Interpreter Licensure Bill

Dear Chair Sen. Deb Patterson, Vice Chair Sen. Cedric Hayden, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Laurie Harrison and I am the administrator for the Deaf/HH Services at Northwest Regional Education Service District. In my role, I hire and supervise Educational American Sign Language Interpreters for children from birth to age 21. As I write this, I have a job posting that has been up since July, 2024, and to date I have had no applicants despite my best efforts to recruit across the country. Last year I had a similar posting up from February, 2024 through August, with no qualified applicants applying. There is a shortage of qualified interpreters throughout our country, and it is my hope that having a structured and supportive process in place for interpreters will create more clarity for interpreters and ultimately will offer a service that is effective for Deaf consumers. As a result, I am writing in support of Senate Bill 950, which was proposed to modify the previous licensing requirements put in place by the previous house bill.

I have been serving on the Rules Advisory Committee to the Board of Sign Language Interpreters for sign language interpreter licensure since February of 2024, and we have met regularly over the past year in an effort to refine our recommendations to the Board for what HB 2696 had in place. We have found that a number of issues have left us unable to move forward. Among the changes that I believe will be helpful are:

1. The previous bill required annual licenses, for interpreters, at a high cost. SB 950 changes this requirement to applying for licensure every 3 years, rather than annually.
2. The previous bill required multiple speciality licenses, whereas SB950 has eliminated licenses for special settings, thus simplifying the licensure process.
3. SB 950 allows for interpreters from out of state to work, temporarily, in Oregon. This is important, as many school systems have needed to resort to using virtual interpreters due to the shortage of in-person interpreters within our state, and interpreters cannot afford, nor should they need to obtain licensure for any and all state in which they may potentially interpret, virtually.
4. SB 950 has removed the limit of 2 renewals for a General License that were included in HB 2696, which I believe will allow interpreters to continue working for a longer period without fear of losing the ability to interpret if they do not achieve the criteria set forth for the Supervisor license.

5. SB 950 allows for students enrolled in an interpreter training program to receive an In-Training license. In order to continue growing the number of interpreters we have in this state, students MUST be able to learn and hone their skills until they are able to achieve a license to allow them to interpret, independently.

I believe that these changes will allow the Rules Advisory Committee and then also the Board of Directors for Sign Language Interpreter Licensure to move forward in solidifying criteria for licensure, and will ultimately improve the services that are being provided to our Deaf/HH community. I ask you to support SB 950 in order to improve and protect the rights of our Deaf/HH children and adults to high quality and reliable interpreting services, in Oregon.

Sincerely,
Laurie Harrison, Ed.D.
Administrator of Deaf/HH Services
Northwest Regional Education Service District