

Submitter: Eric Crook  
On Behalf Of:  
Committee: Senate Committee On Health Care  
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB950

My name is Eric Crook and I wear many hats. I am a Sign Language interpreter, I am the Program Manager within the Program for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing at Southern Oregon Education Service District (SOESD) a hiring entity in Southern Oregon, and I also serve on the State Board of Sign Language Interpreters as the vice chair to the board.

I'm writing to ask you to support SB950. This bill clarifies and streamlines the licensure law that was created during the 2023 session for sign language interpreters in Oregon. The rule-making process has highlighted areas where the statute created redundancies and confusion, and others that left critical gaps, such as an avenue for new interpreters to enter the field. The goal of licensure is to protect the rights of Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing Oregonians, but as written it is derailing that goal and causing harm. The amendments put forth in SB 950 will get us back on track.

Since the passing of HB 2696, the Sign Language Interpreter Licensure law there has been a lot of confusion, disruption, and impacts felt both in the interpreting community and in the Deaf community as well. Due to the strict language used in HB 2696, there is not an avenue for new interpreters to come into the field. This has left college students in training programs wondering where to go; Fearful of getting a misdemeanor for signing because they are not eligible for a license.

I have had educational interpreters who earn about \$20/hr worried that they will need to leave the profession due to the additional burden of paying an annual fee for a license. The current fee structure puts Oregon as the most expensive state to be licensed in.

Additionally, the overlap and redundancies of the licenses is an additional barrier. As an example, in 2020 the state of Oregon passed a law requiring a medical interpreter license, managed by the Oregon Health Authority. That is administered and rules set by OHA. HB 2696 also has introduced a medical license to be issued by the Health Licensing Office (HLO). The requirements to get a license through OHA are different from the requirements to get an HLO medical license.

This redundancy is also felt in education. The Oregon Dept. of Education has their own Division 15 Special education laws and they define the requirements of an educational interpreter. HLO has adopted similar language, but in the process ODE has changed some requirements like the ongoing need for professional development, which I think- was intended to help streamline licensure- however has watered down the requirements for an Educational interpreter. This has the opposite effect of what this bill was initially intended.

The way that HB2696 was worded created many barriers to serve the Deaf population of Oregon. SB 950 streamlines the licensure process from 6 licenses, down to 3. SB 950 creates an avenue for new interpreters to enter the field in a safe way that both protects the students and consumers. SB 950 creates a more appropriate structure for renewals which doesn't over burden working interpreters. Supporting SB 950 is supporting the appropriate amendments to the current law, that will provide better access for our Deaf Oregonians and ensure growth in the interpreting profession for future generations.

I respectfully ask you to support the Oregon Sign Language Interpreter Licensure Amendment Bill (SB 950) to save time, money, and confusion for the state and for interpreters to improve our ability to protect and serve the rights of Oregon's Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing citizens.

Sincerely,  
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