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To All Stakeholders and voting parties,

I am writing to express my concerns regarding Senate Bill 950. Though this bill attempts to repair the broken system created by House Bill 2696 (2023), it instead builds on an unstable foundation with more confusion, bureaucracy, and exclusion. Policy that begins in error and proceeds without correction leads only to deeper harm. Bad policy cannot be made right with more bad policy.

While I acknowledge the importance of ensuring high standards within the profession, and qualified interpreting services, I believe that certain aspects of this bill may have unintended negative consequences for stakeholders, regardless of their hearing status. Herein, I would like to address the issues of *quantity* and *quality* in the interpreter workforce that this policy fails to resolve.

Quantity

It is widely known that there is a *national* shortage of Sign Language Interpreters. Since the passing of HB2696 (2023), this problem has been exacerbated, causing further disruption in services provided to the deaf and hard-of-hearing community. Furthermore, the introduction of new licensing categories and requirements may create barriers for qualified individuals seeking to enter, or continue in, the profession, particularly in areas where there are already limited resources. Instead of protecting language access, the bill perpetuates created barriers by introducing licensing requirements that have already caused a chilling effect in the interpreting field. We are now seeing fewer interpreters available for community work, education, and medical settings, SB 950 does not resolve this—it exacerbates it.

One obvious blind spot that I do not see adequate conversation about in public testimony is the implications of big-city policy on a significantly rural state, Oregon.

According to OHSU Office of Rural Health, 35% of Oregonians live in rural and frontier areas. That is, 1 in 3 of your constituents are not recognized or served well by policy that is better suited for metropolitan areas with more resources, such as Portland, the 25th most populous city in the nation.

Quality

Rural interpreters are largely undervalued, underrepresented, and under-resourced. This policy perpetuates a hierarchy system that keeps Deaf Interpreters, Educational Interpreters, and the undefined “rural interpreter” at the bottom without any provision for improving the proposed, and unverified,

deficiency in skillset. There are real barriers to ANY practitioner in a rural state, such as reliable internet access, professional development opportunities, and fundamental resources. How does SB 950 provide real solutions for this?

Stakeholders are being forced to adapt to policies that push interpretation services into VRI only, instead of as an added option, and thus outsourcing interpreting services, which has a negative impact on the local economy as well as moving the interpreting profession backwards toward the machine-model. The goal of legislation around interpreting should be to *increase* quality & access, not create an elite, restrictive system that sidelines working interpreters and sidelines Deaf people even further.

Lastly, SB 950 proposes to give wide authority to a board still struggling to define its role. These rapid changes, while possibly well-intentioned, are destabilizing.

I urge you to consider these potential impacts and wait for good policy to be presented that actually solves the real underlying issues and provides a more balanced approach that ensures quality without compromising accessibility.

Please vote **NO** on SB 950. Do not continue down the same harmful path that HB 2696 started. Instead, pause and re-center the conversation around policy that

- Seeks real justice, not power and gatekeeping
- Mercifully protects access to communication for all, especially the vulnerable in rural areas
- Humbly acknowledges the blind spots and flawed foundation; pausing before rushing forward with policy that burdens the communities it is intended to serve.

The community deserves real access—not more paperwork, more confusion, and fewer interpreters.

Again, I urge you to oppose SB 950. Stop the cycle of harmful legislation that pretends to fix what it continues to break. Instead, let us begin again—this time centered on dignity, community partnership, and the shared belief that *every* stakeholder is worthy of good policy.

Thank you for your leadership and your willingness to consider the impact of this bill on the lives of Oregonians.

Grace and peace,
Cheryl M. Witters