

May 6, 2013

Senator Monnes-Anderson, Chair
Senator Kruse, Vice Chair
Senate Health Care Committee
Oregon Legislative Assembly
Re: HB 2611

Dear Chair Monnes-Anderson, Vice-Chair Kruse, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Nancy Nickel, I live at 1532 NE 21st Ave# 504 Portland, Or. I represent Portland Jobs with Justice. Our organization supports HB 2611. From my personal perspective, I am a retired attorney, and lawyers must have 3 hours of training every 6 years regarding "Access to Justice" that educates them about the barriers that prevent a diverse population from accessing justice so that the lawyer can work to eliminate those barriers. Health care providers should also have mandatory training to eliminate barriers to the access to healthcare that arise from cultural incompetency.

JWJ is a coalition of 90 labor, community and faith groups. We support this Bill because low-wage workers will benefit from cultural competency training of healthcare workers. We know that a worker who is not well, cannot work, or, they will try to work because they cannot afford to miss a single day, but they won't be able to work very well. I am not even going to address the matter of whether a worker has health insurance and/or can afford medical attention, which is another, very important issue to be addressed at another time. They may seek medical attention and not be able to pay for it, but the question we are addressing here is when they do get medical attention, is there a clear understanding between the worker and the provider about the injury or illness and the worker's circumstances.

Oregon's population is becoming more and more diverse and that diversity is perhaps greatest among low-wage workers. Healthcare providers need to be equipped to serve the new cultures and languages of this growing population. We at JWJ believe that everyone has a right to get appropriate medical attention when they need it, and in the case of a worker, access to medical care is really critical. They have to be well so they will be able to work so that they can provide economic security for themselves and their families.

If a healthcare provider cannot basically understand the language or the culture of that worker, there is obviously going to be a real barrier between that person and their provider, and the treatment outcomes are not going to be as good as they might be.

If there is not communication between that ill or hurt worker and their provider and the worker doesn't get the care he or she needs, it could mean the worker losing a job because of a health problem that might have been taken care of if there was communication. This impacts the worker, their family, and the State. But healthcare workers are pretty much expected to figure out themselves how to communicate with the ever-growing diversity of Oregon's population. It has to be frustrating for them to not be able to meet the needs of their patients. And there is the factor of inefficiency. You will hear testimony from witnesses at the hearing on this Bill that will provide information about the additional costs that inappropriate care adds to the system.

JWJ believes that the State of Oregon has a responsibility to set clear standards for culturally competent healthcare and an additional responsibility to provide healthcare providers with the support and training they need to meet those standards. Having a healthy workforce is vital to the State. We believe that HB2611 should be enacted.

Please, support HB 2611

Nancy Nickel