

Testimony of Cheryl Coon on Senate Bill 698
March 6, 2019

Good afternoon Chair Monnes Anderson and Members of the Committee. I appreciate the opportunity to explain why I am a strong supporter of SB 698, which would ensure that patients, providers and caregivers can read and understand medication labels on their prescription drug containers.

For the last three years, I have been the Executive Director of RISE, a non-profit that serves Oregon's disabled refugees and immigrants. Prior to that time, I had spent many years representing refugees and immigrants with disabilities. I have seen firsthand what happens when a refugee doesn't understand what a label says.

There are many challenges, as you might expect, in coming to a new country which does not speak the language you know. Many challenges are unavoidable and hopefully, not dangerous to a refugee's health. But the inability to understand what your provider has directed with regard to your medication is not unavoidable and it is dangerous to a refugee's health, at a time when he or she is struggling to integrate into a new culture and above all, to get a job.

We did not think of the idea behind SB 698. It was inspired by California and New York, both of which already have recognized the urgency of the issue and addressed it. By requiring pharmacies to provide container labels in both English and a language that the patient can read, SB 698 will prevent harmful and costly adverse impacts to approximately 222,000 Oregonians who have limited English proficiency, and as a result, are unable to read the directions on their prescription drug containers.

In addition, SB 698 will ensure that patients and caregivers are aware of their rights, under federal law and state law, to interpretation when they are speaking with their pharmacist about proper administration of their medications. By requiring signage as to this right, SB 698 will insure that Oregonians need not be hesitant to inform their pharmacist that they need help understanding the directions.

As the past Executive Director of a nonprofit serving disabled refugees and as an Oregonian, I urge the Committee to approve this important legislation and send it to the full Senate for passage.

Sincerely,
Cheryl Coon
Past Executive Director, Refugee & Immigrant Services and Empowerment (RISE)