

Chair Barker and members of the committee,

My name is Amanda Wheeler-Kay and I'm a Healthcare and Community interpreter here in Oregon.

Imagine interpreting at a first counseling appointment at the local county clinic for a transgendered youth with diabetes just released back to a homeless shelter from the hospital after a suicide attempt. Now imagine that you did not know any of that information going into the appointment.

While most appointments may not have this level of complexity, it is common practice to send interpreters in "blind," with little/no information ahead of time as to what situation we are walking into.

Currently, state agencies contract with interpreter agencies to negotiate the terms of interpreting and translating services. The agencies then subcontract with individual interpreters.

Interpreters do not have a voice at the table in the contracting process, and as such, we are marginalized from decisions that directly impact our working conditions, standards of practice, training opportunities, and ability to prepare adequately for assignments. Equally important, these decisions have a direct impact on the health and well-being of the limited-English proficient (LEP) individuals with whom we work, who have a legal right to receive equitable services, and who also lack a voice at the table.

This is one concrete example of a problem that I believe we can begin to address by having meaningful interpreter and LEP representation in the industry. Collective bargaining seems a logical place to begin. For this reason, I ask for your support of HB2231.

If you are interested in additional information and concrete examples from other interpreters, please read the "Working Voices" summary report from a 2018 research study that conducted focus groups to hear directly from interpreters about barriers, attitudes, cultural issues, and specific problems affecting their work. The report includes key recommendations to address "systemic failures that create less-than-ideal working conditions and limit compensation for interpreters, as well as hamper meaningful language access services in Oregon."

I would welcome the opportunity to discuss this further or to answer any questions.

Thank you for your time.