

2019 House bill 2231

Testimony by Bick Huynh (Vietnamese Interpreter for 25 years)

My name is Bick Huynh and I have been a resident of the Portland metropolitan area for over 23 years but I have been an interpreter for over 25 years. I would like to use this opportunity to give my testimony. My testimony will cover three major points:

1. Immigrants
 2. Interpreter's perspective
 3. As a foreign traveler outside the US.
- I can not seem to resist to share the symbolic meaning of the gift we have received from France back in 1883.

Looming above New York Harbor nearby, the Statue of Liberty provided a majestic welcome to those passing through Ellis Island. On a plaque at the entrance to the statue's pedestal is engraved a sonnet called "The New Colossus," written in 1883 by Emma Lazarus as part of a fundraising contest. Its most famous passage speaks to the statue's role as a welcoming symbol of freedom and democracy for the millions of immigrants who came to America seeking a new and better life: "Give me your tired, your poor/Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free/The wretched refuse of your teeming shore/Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me/I lift my lamp beside the golden door!" - <https://www.history.com/topics/landmarks/statue-of-liberty>
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Even though the United States is the newest developed nation that has the most diversity in the world and it's the country that is most friendly to immigrants Which should we Americans should continue to express our values through providing and make available of all qualified and certified interpreters to serve all immigrants and foreigners by passing the bill 2231 unless you have a better idea to create a betterment of a foreign language society that everyone can respect. If your answer is no then please pass the bill 2231.

Fortunately I can share you my experience as an immigrant from Vietnam. Even though I came to the United States in 1983, I understand the fear of not being understood especially when my chest got hurt on the elementary school playground from a shortage of breath and even though my PE teacher sent me to the school nurse, she looked puzzled and concerned due to the fact, she could not understand my trouble. Again I go through the same process by explaining to the nurse. Back in 1983, there was a big shortage of interpreters but looking for a medically professional interpreter is like looking for a needle in a haystack. The nurse asked another student that spoke Vietnamese to interpret for her and the other student was making up words that she think she knows and feel no responsibility to the message she communicated. The other student said I can't breath and might die if I did not stop running. The nurse though I had hyperventilation from what she gathered from the poor interpretation. That very incident has been forever captured in my memory as it was a scary moment that both the untrained,

irresponsible, unqualified interpreter was used out of convenience, for that matter, the nurse misdiagnosed me and called my mom to pick me up or she may have to call the ambulance. Even at the age of 7, I was not only having the feeling of frustration of not being understood, but I was scared. I was scared that I was going to be asked to do something that may further hurt my health or further the frustration. Due to the confused look on the nurse's face and repeated body language, I could tell something was wrong but the language barrier at the time was extremely scary and frustrating. I stayed there until my mom brought her friend who had experience as a professional interpreter later interpret all that the school nurse told him. That was when I learned how precious it was to have someone who was a professional interpreter. Which today's definition of professional means state certified or qualified and interpreter.

When it comes to language barriers and the audience that needs Interpreters, we as adults seldom considered children and their feelings as an important reason to be considered to have more access to a professional interpreters. As an immigrant and a refugee myself, I understand the need to be understood and respected when I was first acclimated to this new: land, culture, people, and language. Therefore, I feel it is my duty as an American citizen with an understanding of the struggles of newly arrived: refugees, immigrants, and foreign visitors to share my testimony. We CAN NOT afford to put people (including children) in a position of fear and chaos, especially knowing how vulnerable children are as they are still learning to communicate in their own language of mother tongue nonetheless trying to attempt to communicate in a foreign language.

1. As an interpreter, I am very fortunate to be able to see from two perspectives. One as a person who had language barriers when first arrive to the US before I got educated and two, as an interpreter; I see the need of a well trained and maintained interpreter to deliver communication efficiently. I sometimes go with my clients as a social services advocate and witnessed other unqualified interpreters interpret for my clients to which I have seen many interpreting errors that may be impertinent to the health of my client but if language was a barrier for the other two parties then the interpreter would be held highly accountable for their ability and skills but if that fails then everyone effort may be wasted if not made worsen. If the interpreter think that he/she had interpreted correctly and no one follows that interpreter for quality assurance and make sure there are little to no interpreting errors, then we have a weak system that calls out for the bill 2231 to provide quality assurance as one of many services they will provide for the interpreters community.
2. Also as a medical interpreter for 25 years, it also exclude the time that I took a break as an interpreter for a few years due to the fact that I was not trained by the medical professionals at the hospital d to cope with empathy. I had to stop interpreting for several years due to watching patients whose children died from cancer and among many heart tugging situation that came with working at the hospital. If the bill 2231 really existed at that time, I would have not quite since the union would probably train me how to deal

with many interpreters' scenarios in a way that would help me continue my interpreting job. I also shared my reason for stopping interpreting for a period of time and it was when I discovered that many other interpreters had done the same due to extreme empathy. The reason I brought this up is the fact that the amount of interpreters apply and qualify for interpreting jobs, and at the same time losing certified/qualified interpreters will create a decrease in the amount of interpreters available to go to clients at the last minute.. Thus, it is another reason to pass the bill 2231 so all interpreters would have the training and skills to deal with many difficult interpreter related scenarios so we could increase the number of interpreters and so we can better serve and be readily available.

3. If you have traveled to a foreign country that the people do not speak English, then you can relate to the fear of not being understood when there is an emergency situation. It is also an exhilarating feeling to explore a new country, culture, food, music, art and it should stop there, but not really. When language is a barrier, it is life and death when a bad or freak accident that can cause you to land in that country's ER of the hospital without a professional interpreter. When I went on a vacation to Thailand in a tour group in year 2001, it was a great experience and I had a great time, but that great time came with a price. I ate many things in the street that I never had in my life. It was adventurous until I had a horrible stomach ache. It hurt so much that I had to go to the hospital. The hospital staff did not touch me until the professional interpreter arrived since they had to know what I was allergic to before they can give me any medication. Because of waiting for the right interpreter to come to allow the medical professionals to do their job, I missed my tour group due to schedule and had to fly back home but it was well worth the wait for that professional interpreter because if anyone can claim to speak a little English like my Tuc Tuc driver (today's version of an Uber/Lyft driver), then I might not make it back alive. My travel abroad had given me the experience that taught me that choosing a professional and a non-professional interpreter is like choosing life or death. I choose life. How about you? If your answer is life then you know that the bill 2231 is the best it is ever going to get when we choose life over death.

Traveling abroad for everyone should be fun and adventurous but not fear of language barriers if professional interpreters are well screened, and quality assurance maintained, then you can have a peace of mind that any immigrants or foreigners with language barriers will be professionally represented by professional interpreters.. Leave the fear at home and let the professional interpreters make your travel smooth. Enjoy and be happy is the purpose of life, so let's pass the bill 2231 to make that happen.

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