

To: House Health Care
From: Alicia Temple, Oregon Law Center
Date: May 9, 2019
Re: SB 698

Chair Salinas and members of the committee:

On behalf of the Oregon Law Center (OLC), I respectfully request your support for SB 698, to require prescription label translations for Oregonians with limited English proficiency. This bill will have significant impacts on improving the health of communities who currently are not provided with medical instructions in a language they can read.

OLC is a non-profit organization that provides free legal help to people struggling to make ends meet. Our mission is to achieve justice for low-income communities in Oregon by providing a full range of the highest quality civil legal services. We advocate for our clients and for the services and programs that help them to overcome poverty. Health and issues of health equity are at the forefront of the needs of our clients.

Oregon has done a lot of work to increase availability of healthcare insurance for individuals but true access depends on more than having insurance. It also means being able to effectively receive care and treatment. There are too many examples of how language barriers have led to harmful health outcomes. Providing written translation of prescription labels would make a significant difference in reducing health disparities.

The amendments to SB 698 in the Senate and the -3 have taken into account some of the implementation concerns expressed by pharmacists. Advocates have worked with the Board of Pharmacy to make key changes while still maintaining the most important parts of the bill. This includes ensuring that the translation remains on the label for any information that would be on the label in English and requiring access to a broad enough range of languages that the most vulnerable Oregonians can have access to their prescription information in the language they can read and understand.

Access to medical information in a language that a patient understands is critically important. There has been litigation over a lack of interpretation services in other states, and OLC is looking into legal options for our clients who have experienced this disparity. Passing SB 698 would preempt the need for this remedy.