

March 2, 2021

To: House Committee on Health Care
Re: Letter in support for HB 2359

Chair Prusak, Vice Chairs Salinas and Hayden, and members of the Health Care Committee,

My name is Kara DeGiovanni. I am a certified Spanish health care interpreter, as well as a Sign Language interpreter, and have been interpreting in the state of Oregon since 2013. I am writing in hopes that you vote yes on HB 2359, which will close a current loophole that has resulted in unqualified people doing the vast majority of interpreting work in the state of Oregon. Voting yes will improve the quality and efficacy of interpreting services in our health care institutions, thereby improving health outcomes for BIPOC and immigrant communities while reducing state spending.

In December 2019, I got my Spanish health care interpreter certification. Like almost all health care interpreters, I am an independent contractor and thus approached my interpreting services company to renegotiate my contract. Despite being one of relatively few certified Spanish interpreters in the state, the company refused to negotiate. Due to the loophole in current legislation, there is no accountability on the part of healthcare facilities to use Certified and Qualified interpreters. We are left unable to negotiate terms that allow us to obtain ongoing education, training, and certifications.

Given unpaid travel time going site to site, and unpaid administrative time (invoicing, finding and confirming work, preparing for assignments, etc), we are compensated for about 5 hours of work in an 8-hr work day. My \$26/hr compensation from my language company becomes \$16.25/hr, and that's *before* I pay self-employment taxes, costs of certification and CEUs, liability insurance, and other operating expenses; nevermind health insurance or retirement. As members of the medical field with a very specialized and essential role, even risking our own health and safety during the pandemic, this is unacceptable.

Sub-standard compensation for health care interpreters makes education, training, and longevity in the interpreting field extremely difficult. This leaves the state with a revolving door workforce, the majority of whom are untrained and unvetted. This leads to errors, misdiagnoses, tests ordered "just in case," no-shows, poor health outcomes for patients, and increased health care costs for the state.

HB 2359 not only directs the Bureau of Labor and Industries to hold health care facilities and interpreting companies accountable, it also professionalizes the workforce by directing the Oregon Health Authority to work with the Oregon Council on Health Care Interpreters to create a free or low cost training program to certify and qualify more interpreters. When health care entities are required to work with Certified and Qualified interpreters, we will be in a position to negotiate reasonable terms and thus establish long-term career opportunities that include ongoing education and training. With a more skilled workforce, members of Oregon's BIPOC and immigrant communities will experience the positive health outcomes they deserve.

I ask that you vote yes on HB 2359, and thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Kara DeGiovanni, MS
ASL/English/Spanish Interpreter

Oregon Interpreters in Action