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# A STRONG VOICE FOR OREGON'S WORKERS

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TO: Chair Prusak  
Vice-Chairs Hayden and Salinas  
Members of the House Healthcare Committee

FR: Catie Theisen, OR AFL-CIO

RE: HB 2359 Support

March 3, 2021

The Oregon AFL-CIO represents 300,000 workers across Oregon and is a voice for all workers in the legislative process. As such, our members are health care providers, patients and community members. HB 2359 helps ensure our healthcare system is just, fair and effective.

Currently, far too many companies are putting their profits ahead of the health and safety of Oregonians. Today, too many Oregon patients with Limited English Proficiency are not able to get highly trained and certified interpreters. Without these health care workers, patients are less likely to effectively comprehend and communicate on critical matters of their health because of a loophole in statute that allows health care interpretation services to hire untrained health care interpreters, even though there are qualified or OHA certified healthcare interpreters available.

Further, there is no state oversight on the safety of health care interpreters: despite working in high-risk areas for COVID-19 and other infectious diseases, they have to provide their own PPE in order to work with a provider, there is no clear complaint process for interpreters who experience wage or labor violations, and because they are misclassified, they cannot access workers' compensation and other basic employment benefits. And there is no accountability mechanism for companies who choose to hire less qualified interpreters.

HB 2359 closes the current loophole by requiring interpretation services to work with certified or qualified health care interpreters registered with the Oregon Health Authority. The bill also requires BOLI to implement policies and processes to hold health care interpretation services accountable by imposing a fine if they do not work with qualified or certified health care interpreters, and investigate complaints and impose penalties. Finally, to ensure that the health care interpreter workforce is professionalized, HB 2359 directs the Oregon Health Authority to work with the Oregon Council on Health Care Interpreters to design a program providing free or low cost training to ensure the qualification and certification of health care interpreters.

Every Oregon patient deserves the highest quality of care possible, even if English is not their first language. And every health care worker deserves to have basic workplace protections. Further, we know that more training for interpreters reduces medical errors, meaning that costs and efficiencies are saved for our health care system at-large. COVID-19 has only underscored the impacts of institutional racism in our health care system and society. Now is the time to help fix those wrongs for the short and long-term health of our communities. We encourage your Yes vote on HB 2359.