

I am a nationally certified sign language interpreter here in Oregon. While I have obtained degrees and certifications that ensure I have the in-depth knowledge, training, and ethical principles to successfully serve Deaf Oregonians, too often I encounter consumers who have suffered with unqualified, incapable interpreters over the years. If you were diagnosed with cancer, wouldn't you want the most accurate communication possible for your medical appointment? What if you were rushed to the ER for an emergency? What if you had a legal deposition? What about an annual performance review at work? These are just a few of the critical moments where you can see the value of hiring from a pool of qualified interpreters. Of course, not every encounter is a life-or-death event, but every Deaf, Deafblind, and Hard-of-Hearing Oregonian deserves the peace of mind of having qualified, skilled interpreters.

HB3231 will protect the more than 180,000 Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard-of-Hearing Oregonians in our state by establishing a licensure requirement for Sign Language interpreters. Currently in Oregon, anyone can legally represent themselves as a Sign Language interpreter whether or not they are qualified and provide services in settings such as emergency press-conferences, drug treatment facilities, or attorney-client meetings. This results in unqualified or unethical interpreting services, violating the rights of Deaf, Deafblind, and Hard-of-Hearing Oregonians and potentially causing great harm to consumers. Along with the risk to the consumers, hiring entities including government agencies are at risk of lawsuits if they hire interpreters who are unqualified.

HB3231 will create a State Board of Sign Language Interpreters within Oregon Health Authority, outline requirements for interpreter licensure and establish standards for the profession. It will also protect consumers and hiring entities by requiring licensure to work as a Sign Language interpreter in Oregon. Over 30 states have established such requirements for Sign Language interpreters and the passing of this bill would ensure Oregon is in line with national best practices.

I respectfully ask for the Committee's support of HB3231 the Oregon Sign Language Interpreter Licensure Bill because this law will protect the rights of Oregon's Deaf, Deafblind, and Hard-of-Hearing citizens.