

Written testimony in support of bill to create an Oregon State Board of Certified Interpreters

I have been working in the field of educational interpreting for 20 plus years. I am in total support of passing a bill that will allow for the official creation of an Oregon State Board of Certified Interpreters. I believe that having a legal organized group of professionals, like an Oregon State Board of Certified Interpreters, could help to provide legal measures that ensure that before public entities hire a person as an interpreter for their meetings or events, they could be required to first verify the potential interpreter's experience, qualifications, certifications/licensing, etc., and also that the potential interpreter meets or exceeds these required qualifications before choosing to hire them for an assignment.

In my previous work experience, I have observed, that when an under qualified person shows up for an interpretation assignment, completes the task of apparent interpretation, and is later recognized as underqualified or not a professional interpreter, by either the deaf client or another interpreter, it creates a negative reflection on us as professionals in the field of interpreting, the business providing the service, and members of the deaf community themselves. Having a legally organized group of professionals, like an Oregon State Board of Certified Interpreters, would greatly help to establish, regulate, and maintain consistent standards of professionalism and qualifications. Their contribution and involvement in the process of creating state laws related to the profession of ASL interpreting, will be crucial in the process of creating standardized requirements that businesses and public services must follow in the process of hiring interpretation services. There have been many examples of press conferences, court cases and other public events, in the news, of people, assigned as the interpreter, simply throwing their hands around in repetitive movements or gestures, with maybe a few signs here and there, and calling it "ASL interpretation", and then later, they are publicly "called out" as not a legitimate interpreter. When this happens, society tends to not take our profession seriously or even consider it a professional at all. In this instance, the board's previous involvement in the creation of laws related to verification of interpreter qualification, could potentially alleviate many embarrassing situations to our profession; such as people showing up uncertified, without previous verification, and later being publicly discredited, thus perpetuating the negative social image of interpreters as not a legitimate professional community.

Not only are interpreters as a profession misrepresented by this type of debacle, but businesses' level of quality and professionalism is also misrepresented. Deaf clients have an expectation that if they are a professional establishment, they will provide a qualified interpreter. Having an Oregon State Board of Certified Interpreters could help to ensure that qualified interpreters will be provided and that the deaf clients have a legal right to the quality of the interpretation as well as the availability of one. This will help to alleviate possible lawsuits against companies and will maintain a good professional reputation for businesses in the local deaf communities.

In addition to the under qualified interpreter without legal accountability being a misrepresentation of interpreters and businesses as professionals, there occurs an additional misinterpretation of the deaf clients as well. The success of ASL interpreting being recognized as a professional field, relies heavily on the relationship of trust between members of deaf communities and the interpreters. Creating an Oregon State Board of Certified interpreters would also ensure that members of the deaf community receive qualified interpreters, thus maintaining that relationship of trust.