

SUBJECT: Support for HB3231, the Oregon Sign Language Interpreter Licensure Bill

To the Chair Prusak, Vice-Chair Hayden, Vice-Chair Salinas, and members of the Committee:

My name is Jolleen Ives and I am a nationally certified sign language interpreter (NIC – Advanced) specializing in medical and mental health interpreting who has been working in Oregon since 2005. I hold additional credentials in my specialty, Oregon Certified Healthcare Interpreter (OCHI), Core Certified Healthcare Interpreter (CoreCHI) and Qualified-Mental Health Interpreter (Q-MHI). In addition to being an interpreter, I am the immediate past president of Oregon Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (ORID), and chair of the ORID legislative committee. I am writing to urge the Committee's support of HB3231.

This bill is imperative to protect the Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing (DDBHH) communities from the persistence of unequal access. The pervasive issue of unqualified interpreters has been ever prevalent throughout the nation. Oregon Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf along with Oregon Association for the Deaf have worked for several years to develop a plan to combat the injustice suffered by the DDBHH communities due to unqualified interpreters. It is time for Oregon to join the more than thirty (30) states who have already confronted this issue through similar legislation.

Unqualified interpreters have been the source of daily anxiety, frustration, and misunderstandings for individuals from the DDBHH community. Within my specialty I have seen the errors of unqualified interpreters ranging in severity with the minor ones taking months to correct. These errors come in many forms, whether it be a misinterpretation of the diagnosis, medication errors due to inaccurate directions, the misidentification of the chief complaint, or a patient who has been waiting for a qualified interpreter to be provided before they share their concerns causing a minor problem to become more severe. When we delve into the realm of mental health, you encounter individuals struggling with addiction, potentially in and out of the legal system, who are fighting to get clean but unable to understand the interpreter during their treatment. I have seen clients with a misdiagnosed mental health disorder being improperly medicated, as well as individuals who are suicidal unable to access the services available to help them because the interpreter who is provided is not qualified. Without a qualified interpreter, the risk to an individual is not only life or death, but also lifelong health consequences affecting the patient's quality of life.

When I was president of the Oregon Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, I would receive countless complaints about unqualified interpreters in every domain in the field of interpreting. Unqualified interpreters are present in the educational system providing language modeling for young children, the legal system, medical facilities, job interviews, and counseling appointments, to name a few. Unfortunately, our ability to act was limited to an attempt to educate hiring

entities on the importance of using qualified interpreters, and more often than not the bottom line would win over proper access. Without passing HB3231, no action that can be taken aside from a lawsuit to ensure qualified interpreters are provided. The DDBHH communities have a right to communication access and are all too often provided with inadequate access by an interpreter that does not meet a minimum standard of qualification.

Current laws require a qualified interpreter without providing guidelines or standards as to which qualifications are adequate. If an interpreter is unable to pass a certification exam, allows their certification to lapse from not maintaining their continuing education, or has their certification revoked due to unethical behavior, nothing prevents that individual from continuing to work and continuing to do harm. Unqualified interpreters provide the wrongful assumption that successful communication is happening, most of the time hiring entities can be unaware of the errors being made by the unqualified interpreter. Without the hiring entity being properly informed on how to assess an interpreter's abilities, qualifications and certifications, it is impossible to ensure the interpreter hired is qualified. This bill will provide the screening tool that has been missing for far too long.

Vote to protect the DDBHH community. Vote to provide a clear measure of what a qualified interpreter is, which will also help to prevent lawsuits against hiring entities. Vote to support the interpreters who are passionate about providing quality services to the DDBHH community.

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.

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.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jolleen Ives". The signature is written in a light gray or black ink on a white background.

Jolleen Ives

Oregon City, Oregon 97045