

Rep. Rachel Prusak,
Chair House Committee on Health Care
900 Court St. NE Salem, OR 97301

April 6, 2021

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 Kelsey Gilstrap, I am a Deaf teacher at Oregon School for the Deaf. I am writing to urge the Committee's support of HB3231.

This bill 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, emergency medical situations or attorney-client meetings. This results in unqualified or unethical interpreting services, violating the rights of our 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, establish standards for the profession and by doing this 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.

As a Deaf person, I cannot stress enough how important it is for a qualified interpreter to be provided for both parties: ASL users and English speakers. When it comes down to medical, providing a qualified interpreter versus a non-qualified interpreter can mean the difference between life and death. I have two stories I would like to share. One time, I had a dentist appointment due to pain in my tooth and I was given an interpreter (who did not have license)--the sign for menstruation period and dentist may look similar but they both have very different hand position. I was explaining to my dentist about my history of dentists and the interpreter interpreted the conversation, stating that I have been seeing doctors specializing in menstruation. I was fortunate to recognize the sheer confusion and significant miscommunication to intervene and advocate for myself. Some people may not have this privilege of doing so. Another story I had was of that time when a student of mine went to a doctor appointment. She had her mother with her and the doctor office hired a Spanish interpreter for the mother, but not for the student--who is Deaf and communicates primarily in American Sign Language. There was an extreme lack of information as her mother tried to relay the messages between the child to the doctor--only to result in miscommunication and mistreatment. The student ended up needing a surgery weeks later and this could have been prevented if a qualified ASL interpreter was hired instead of relying on the student's mother to interpret.

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,
SIGN YOUR NAME