

Sen. Kathleen Taylor
Senate Committee on Labor and Business
900 Court St. NE
Salem, OR 97301

January 27, 2022

SUBJECT: Support for 1562, the Oregon Sign Language Interpreter Licensure Bill

To the Chair Taylor, Vice-Chair Knopp, and members of the Committee:
I am writing to urge this Committee to support SB 1562.

As owners/operators of a sign language interpreting agency, we strongly support a licensing requirement for sign language interpreters in Oregon. We are too familiar with the practice of some people with sign language abilities passing themselves off as trained interpreters when they do not have the training, education, experience or skill to interpret. Just as not every speaker of a foreign language is competent to be an interpreter, not everyone who knows some sign language is competent to interpret.

In some contexts, like medical, legal and educational settings, the consequences of inadequate interpreting can be dire, even life threatening. Yet, in Oregon, there is nothing stopping imposters from passing themselves off as sign language interpreters.

Agencies like ours, who properly vet interpreters to make sure they are competent and well-suited to their assignments, are at a competitive disadvantage compared to agencies who will send subpar interpreters. Our hearts go out to deaf, hard-of-hearing, and deaf-blind individuals who experience the consequences of inadequate interpreting. Legal and medical practitioners are also potentially subject to negative consequences, such as liability lawsuits, when there is not a clear method of determining who is, and is not, a competent interpreter.

We don't necessarily agree with every detail of SB1562, but we respect that it is the product of many years of hard work by members of the ASL-speaking community who have made a strong effort to garner consensus on the best possible bill. SB1562 needs to be passed.

SB1562 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.

SB1562 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 SB1562 the Oregon Sign Language Interpreter Licensure Bill because this law will protect the rights of Oregon's Deaf, Deafblind, and Hard of Hearing citizens.