

Submitter: Andrew Hoeksema

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Behavioral Health and Health Care

Measure: HB2696

SUBJECT: Support for HB 2696, the Oregon Sign Language Interpreter Licensure Bill

To the Chair Nosse, Vice-Chair Goodwin, Vice-Chair Nelson, and members of the Committee:

I am writing to urge this Committee to support HB 2696.

I am close friends with people in the Deaf community who are essential and active members of our Central Oregon community. They are deserving of better and reliable options for communicating in the healthcare setting. Please make that possible for them in this legislative session.

This Bill protects the Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing communities 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 such as government agencies are at risk of lawsuits if they hire interpreters who are unqualified. Licensure will establish standards for the profession, as well as 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.

My friends in the Deaf community are professionals who recreate outdoors on the weekends. They end up in the hospital for the same reasons you and I do, but when there, they are not provided with adequate communication and translation services. Please act on their behalf by elevating this bill from committee to the house floor in time to be signed into law this session.

Respectfully,
Andrew Hoeksema
Redmond, OR