

February 4, 2023

The Honorable Rob Nosse
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court St NE
Salem, OR 97301

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

Chair Nosse and members of the House Committee on Behavioral Health and Health Care:

I am a registered nurse at a community health center serving some of our most vulnerable populations in Bend and surrounding Central Oregon communities. I urge you to support House Bill 2696.

This bill would help ensure safe and equitable health care for people who are Deaf, Deafblind, and Hard of Hearing. Under current Oregon law, anyone can represent themselves as a Sign Language interpreter regardless of their actual ability. This results in unqualified or unethical individuals acting as interpreters even when they lack the competence to do so, putting patients at risk of significant harm. 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.

As a nurse, I have an ethical duty to ensure patients in my care can accurately communicate their health concerns to me, and that they can understand the care being provided to them. Because I am unable to communicate by sign language, I depend on interpreters for accurate communication. However, if I cannot trust that the interpreter assigned has the ability to interpret complex medical terminology, my ability to provide care is compromised. The Oregon legislature can fix this and ensure my Deaf, Deafblind, and Hard of Hearing patients receive the same quality of care as my hearing patients.

I respectfully ask you to support the Oregon Sign Language Interpreter Licensure Bill because this law will protect the rights of Oregon's Deaf, Deafblind, and Hard of Hearing residents.

Sincerely,

Oliver Tatom, RN
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