

Rep. Rob Nosse
House Committee On Behavioral Health and Health Care
900 Court St. NE
Salem, OR 97301

January 27, 2023

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.

My name is Jim Celestine and I'm a nationally certified ASL interpreter working in the state of Oregon. I grew up as a child of Deaf adults. Growing up with Deaf parents I can't tell you how many times we have dealt with individuals who claim they are qualified as interpreters just to find out they have very limited ability to speak fluently, let alone take the challenging task of ASL interpreting. Often times what will happen afterwards is my parents had to reschedule the appointment or they would rely on me to interpret for them, which in turn now puts me in the role as interpreter and no longer a son or brother.

Now that I'm a professional, still to this day, these people who claim to be interpreters are still out there. They are interpreting for our young children who have yet learned to speak up for themselves and request for a new interpreter. Unfortunately these students are surrounded by teachers, administrators, and parents who have no ability to discern the quality of interpreting that's being administered. These young children need qualified interpreters who are screened by their peers to ensure they have strong language models and also have the ability to fully express themselves as individuals. Not only that, professional interpreters are trained to know the interpersonal and intrapersonal dynamics needed for a student's success. I implore you to please support this bill, so that Deaf and Hard of Hearing students receive the best Oregon has to offer.

HB2696 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.

HB2696 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 HB2696 the Oregon Sign Language Interpreter Licensure Bill because this law will protect the rights of Oregon's Deaf,

Deafblind, and Hard of Hearing citizens.