

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.

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 am hearing, and I have been an ASL student with Deaf teachers for the last 4 years. During that time, I have been exposed to many stories of Deaf consumers being inadequately represented by unqualified interpreters, and it is heart-wrenching to learn, for example, of someone having to return to a doctor's office numerous times just to get the correct information because they are being inadequately communicated with, to and for. I was previously in the PCC ASL to English Interpreter program (prior to Covid-19 requiring me to change my focus) and there is a strong emphasis in that program regarding the responsibility and connection between interpreters to the Deaf community. However, I am aware that other programs may not put as much emphasis on that aspect of the education, or there are people who consider themselves to be adequate interpreters who have never even taken a class related to the process of interpreting and perhaps don't recognize the negative impact they can have on a Deaf person or the Deaf community. It is imperative that the state view our Deaf community members as valued and valuable, and do what they can to ensure that a Deaf consumer is not allowed to have an interpreter who hasn't been adequately vetted by a panel of peers and met required standards.

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.

Sincerely,

Lauren Beeney  
6482 Palomino Way  
West Linn, OR 97068