

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 Sarah Young and I am an EIPA Qualified in the state of Oregon and am a Nationally Certified ASL/English Interpreter and I work primarily as an educational interpreter. I am writing to urge the Committee's support of HB 2696.

I strongly believe the passage of this bill will bring a world of change to Deaf and Hard of Hearing people who use Sign Language here in Oregon. I am familiar with the struggle to find qualified ASL interpreters, as this is the same struggle my family was experiencing in the 1980's and 1990's. My brother was born Deaf and used interpreters during his experience in K-12 education, and continues to use interpreters today. He was lucky enough to have strong advocates on his side and still my family had to fight repeatedly to find qualified interpreters for his K-12 experience. Now, over 30 years later, parents, students and members of our community are continuing with this same fight.

As an interpreter who is involved with the educational community here in Oregon, I have seen job descriptions for educational interpreters stating "EIPA 3.0 preferred". The minimum qualification is an EIPA (Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment) score of 3.5 to work in educational settings, as required by the Oregon Administrative Rules(OARs). Unfortunately, not all programs are aware of, or abide by the rules set in the OARs and there is no board or entity that I am aware of that is enforcing these minimum requirements. The result is that students in Oregon who use ASL interpreters are placed with interpreters who do not meet the minimum requirements set by the OAR's.

I strongly believe that by passing HB2696 districts and contractors will be in a better place to hire interpreters qualified at 3.5 on the EIPA for educational interpreting. HB2696 will also make it easier for districts to find qualified interpreters in their areas and will make it easier to ensure the legal right to a free and appropriate education is met for Deaf and Hard of Hearing students.

I am hopeful that with the passage of this bill students like my brother and mothers, fathers and families like mine will not have to endure the same struggles families were going through in the 1980's, 1990's and the same struggles that unfortunately continue today. We have a choice today to make a difference and a better future for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing students and community members of Oregon. I strongly encourage you to pass HB2696.

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 young students and citizens.

Sincerely,
Sarah Young
EIPA 3.5 Qualified ASL/English Interpreter
RID Certified ASL/English Interpreter
45 NE Holland St
Portland OR 97211