

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 Jolleen Ives and I am a nationally certified sign language interpreter (NIC – Advanced) specializing in medical and mental health interpreting who has been working in Oregon since 2005. I hold additional credentials in my specialty, Oregon Certified Healthcare Interpreter (OCHI), Core Certified Healthcare Interpreter (CoreCHI) and Qualified-Mental Health Interpreter (Q-MHI). In addition to being an interpreter, I am a past president of Oregon Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (ORID), and chair of the ORID legislative committee. I am writing to urge the Committee's support of HB 2696.

This bill is imperative to protect the Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing (DDBHH) communities from the persistence of unequal access. The pervasive issue of unqualified interpreters has been ever prevalent throughout the nation. Oregon Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf along with Oregon Association for the Deaf have worked together for several years to develop a plan to combat the injustice suffered by the DDBHH communities due to unqualified interpreters. It is time for Oregon to join the more than thirty (30) states who have already confronted this issue through similar legislation.

Unqualified interpreters have been the source of daily anxiety, frustration, and misunderstandings for individuals from the DDBHH community. Within my specialty I have seen the errors of unqualified interpreters ranging in severity with even the most minor errors requiring months to correct and even longer to reestablish trust. These errors come in many forms, whether it be a misinterpretation of the diagnosis, medication errors due to inaccurate directions or dosage information, the misidentification of the chief complaint, or minor issues becoming more severe as the patient waits for a qualified interpreter to be provided. When we delve into the realm of mental health, you will encounter individuals struggling with addiction, potentially in and out of the legal system, who are fighting to get clean but unable to understand the interpreter during their treatment. I have seen clients with a misdiagnosed mental health disorder being improperly medicated, as well as individuals who are suicidal and unable to access the services or help due to the interpreter not being qualified. Without a

qualified interpreter, the risk to an individual is not only life or death, but also lifelong health consequences affecting the patient's quality of life.

When I was president of the Oregon Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, I would receive countless complaints about unqualified interpreters throughout the field of interpreting. Unqualified interpreters are present in the educational system providing language modeling for young children, the legal system, medical facilities, job interviews, and counseling appointments, to name a few. Unfortunately, our organization was limited in our scope to help those suffering from inadequate services. Those who have had their certification revoked are not barred from working in our field. We were let with education, however more often than not the bottom line would win over proper access. Without passing HB 2696, no action can be taken aside from a lawsuit to ensure qualified interpreters are provided. The DDBHH communities have a right to communication access and are all too often provided with inadequate access by an interpreter that does not meet a minimum standard of qualification that are nationally accepted throughout our field.

In most federal and state laws there are no guidelines or standards to clearly define which qualifications are adequate to identify an interpreter as qualified. Currently unqualified interpreters being hired may look like the following: an interpreter is unable to pass a certification exam, allows their certification to lapse from not maintaining their continuing education, or has their certification revoked due to unethical behavior. None of these circumstances prevent that individual from continuing to work and continuing to do harm. Unqualified interpreters provide the wrongful assumption that successful communication is happening, most of the time hiring entities are unaware of the errors being made by the unqualified interpreter as they are not fluent in American Sign Language, and proper infrastructure for complaints are not established to be accessed by Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing individuals. Without the hiring entity being properly informed on how to assess an interpreter's abilities, qualifications and certifications, it is impossible to ensure the interpreter hired is qualified. This bill will provide the screening tool that has been missing for far too long.

Please vote to protect the DDBHH community. Vote to provide clarity as to what a qualified interpreter is, helping to prevent lawsuits against hiring entities, misdiagnosis, equal access to employment, and lessen the anxiety felt throughout the Deaf, Deafblind and Hard of Hearing community members. Vote to support the interpreters who are passionate about providing quality services to the Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing community.

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.

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,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Jolleen Ives".

Jolleen Ives
Oregon City, Oregon 97045
Nationally Certified Interpreter – NIC Advance
Qualified Mental Health Interpreter - QMHI
Oregon Certified Healthcare Interpreter – OCHI
CoreCertified Healthcare Interpreter – CoreCHI