

Esteemed Chair Patterson, Vice Chair Haydan and Members of the Committee,

My name is Felicity Ratway. I hold certifications through the Oregon Health Authority and National Board of Certification for Medical Interpreters and a Master's degree in Interpreting and Translation Studies. I have been working as a health care interpreter in Oregon since 2014. I also teach training and continuing education courses for health care interpreters, serve on the Oregon Council on Health Care Interpreters, and have been researching language access as a doctoral student of public health.

I am writing in support of SB 584 because this bill will give interpreters a means of getting paid directly by the state, supporting better pay for interpreters and cutting administrative costs associated with contracting interpreters through third parties.

Language minority patients experience disparities in quality of care and access to care, contributing to disparate health outcomes. Access to trained interpreters with demonstrated proficiency and skills is shown to mitigate or even eliminate these disparities. Accordingly, Oregon has passed legislation requiring access to interpreters for language minority patients whenever possible, and has made achieving health equity by 2030 a priority. However, CCO performance on the language access incentive metric in place these last couple years has shown that access to interpreters who have met state standards is still sporadic. Interpreters are still struggling to make ends meet in this profession, exacerbating the problem. Fewer than 10% of interpreters on the OHA registry currently renew their credentials, and a survey of health care interpreters conducted by the Oregon Council on Health Care Interpreters found that compensation and cost of continuing education were the most-often-cited reasons for not renewing. It is clear that improvements are needed to make staying in the profession possible for interpreters. Getting paid directly by the state, rather than booked by language companies who currently serve as intermediaries, would save the state and better pay for us.

This legislature supported interpreters in 2021 with provisions ranging from access to PPE to clarification of requirements to work with interpreters on the OHA registry. One of the tasks assigned to the Health Authority in 2021 was researching how to develop a scheduling mechanism like the one we are asking for in this bill. Now that OHA has concluded the research, we are asking for your support again so we can get across the finish line.

In addition to the creation of a scheduling mechanism to allow the Oregon Health Authority to pay interpreters directly, Section 7 of this bill would also allow damages to be sought for noncompliance with laws regarding interpreting services. No government agency is currently

tasked with enforcing statutory requirements for language service companies, and though HB 2359 tasked OHA and DHS with enforcing language access requirements for health care providers, these agencies have not created a complaint process or specified penalties for noncompliance. While a proactive monitoring approach with clear penalties for noncompliance would be appropriate given low levels of compliance reported by CCOs, as was repeatedly mentioned in rulemaking, this section of the bill would at least allow some remedy when clinics fail to offer interpreting services.

In order to support interpreters' efforts to remain in the profession, and in support of the goal of achieving health equity by 2030, I urge your support for SB 584.