

Submitter: Mirna Bonales  
On Behalf Of:  
Committee: Senate Committee On Health Care  
Measure: SB584

Dear Senator Patterson & Senator Hayden,

As a director of interpreters at AMN Language Services, I oppose Oregon Senate Bill 584.

I agree that Oregon's HC interpreters deserve fair & reasonable wages. We are passionate about improving the quality of patient care. However, I believe this bill will unintentionally cause harm to limited English proficient and Deaf & Hard of Hearing patients.

Language access is a federally mandated civil right, although not federally funded. (now that would be a nice bill)

- Sec. 1557 of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act
- 14th Amendment
- Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964
- Federal law gives the same right to language access to all Limited English Proficient patients

Consider the following:

- Another pandemic - suddenly on-site interpreters are not available-in order to provide interpreters, organizations need to revert to remote interpreting. This well-intentioned bill would cause a tremendous block to LEP patients in OR by severely limiting access to any language not in your registry.
- The linguistic & cultural diversity of OR & the US is growing. Those who speak a foreign language at home increased 380% in Oregon
- In 2021, well over 2 million successful health care interpreting encounters occurred for Oregon patients in over 150 languages
- Today, there are only 1,000 Oregon-qualified health care interpreters, in less than 25 languages
- Interpreting encounters that happen in every county in the state, all year long are well documented
- Less than 5% of healthcare encounters were serviced by interpreters residing in OR. This statistic alone is a disservice to the other 95% individuals
- The interpreters in the Oregon Health Care Interpreter Registry primarily provide on-site interpreting in the greater Portland area, hence other OR areas will be severely underserved
- Simply put, there are not enough interpreters in Oregon to provide ALL of the health care interpreting

Our interpreters & support personnel are a dedicated and committed group of professionals who have made it their life's work to see that all LEP & Deaf and Hard of Hearing patients have full autonomy in their healthcare encounters and have their civil rights met regardless of their location or unique language needs.

Language services companies are relied upon in all states and across the world for a wide range of vital functions:

- Procuring qualified medical interpreters in multiple languages regardless of location
- Staffing for on demand, 24/7 service delivery (on-site and virtually)
- Logging session data for auditing and fiscal compliance
- End to end interpretation platform development and maintenance
- National recruiting, training, vetting, quality assurance of interpreting workforce
- Enhancing the professionalism and ethical decision-making of interpreters enforcing the use of the codes of professional conduct for medical interpreters
- Employment and benefits packages for interpreting workforce to assure retention and access to services when needed.
- Assisting healthcare organizations in meeting their mandate regulatory responsibilities

The proposed small amount of money given to OHA to support some of these functions will not be sufficient to meet what language services providers and health care providers spend on these foundational activities.

In summary, research shows that providing high-quality language access to patients who are unable to communicate in English with their healthcare providers, results in better patient outcomes, better adherence to aftercare instructions, lower readmission rates, lower malpractice filings and lawsuits regarding deprivation of language access rights. Please do not inadvertently place further barriers to their care by sponsoring this short-sighted bill.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration and attention to serving the best interests of ALL Oregonians.

Sincerely,  
Mirna Bonales