

The Honorable Rev. Dr. Deb Patterson
Chair, Oregon State Senate Committee on Health Care

The Honorable Cedric Hayden
Vice Chair, Oregon State Senate Committee on Health Care

Dear Senator Patterson and Senator Hayden,

My name is **Ronald L. Smith**, and I am an Oregon-based healthcare interpreter in various dialects of the Lao Language. I write to oppose Oregon Senate Bill 584. This bill would require the Oregon Health Authority (OHA) to develop a web-based platform to support the scheduling and payment of interpreters for language access for Oregonian health care patients. I oppose this bill because it threatens to make my life as an independent contractor much more difficult. It also disqualifies the present organizations which have been contacting and fulfilling the needs of doctors, courts, lawyers for their contacts with interpreters who have been contacted by various Language Lines and official organizations who do that contacting.

Nationally, more than 80% of interpreters and translators work as Independent Contractors (ICs). As an IC, I set my hours – I can accept or refuse assignments according to my schedule. This is an enormous advantage to those of us who have child or eldercare responsibilities, for example. I set my rates, and can negotiate rates with my clients. For each of the companies I work with, I had to demonstrate my skills and qualifications, including taking their tests, which in many cases are harder than the national certification tests offered in health care by CCHI and IMIA. **I have been qualified for the last forty years to do the interpretation for the Lao refugees who have come to this country as well as some times for being contacted to interpret for Lao nationals who are still in Laos. They would not consider having to contact a government agency to have their conversation interpreted in the United States.**

Having the Oregon Health Authority replace the many language companies working in Oregon will make my life more challenging. Instead of being on the “rolodex” of several companies, which makes it possible to fill my schedule out, I will be dependent on one client to provide assignments in Oregon. The bill also does not clarify how rates will be set, or who sets them.

Language access in health care in Oregon could be improved, but this bill isn’t the way to do it.. I have been an interpreter for various organization as they have had needs for the interpretations for their clients. I do not believe it is the wisest matter that they would be obliterated in the scheme of having to contact a state agency which would be set up for finding interpreters.

Respectfully,



Ronald L. Smith