

Submitter: Kenneth Houghtaling
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Health Care
Measure: SB584

Dear Senator Patterson and Senator Hayden,

As a manager of interpreters for AMN Language Services, I am writing to oppose Oregon Senate Bill 584.

While we agree that Oregon's healthcare interpreters should be paid fair and reasonable wages, and we are passionate about improving the quality of patient care for all, we believe this bill will unintentionally cause harm to limited English proficient and Deaf and Hard of Hearing patients needing care.

Language access is a civil right and federally mandated. (Although not federally funded)

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, regardless of language or location.

Please consider the following:

The linguistic and cultural diversity of Oregon and the US is growing (from 1980 – 2018 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 1000 Oregon-qualified health care interpreters, in less than 25 languages

These documented encounters happen in every county in the state

Less than 5% of healthcare encounters were serviced by interpreters residing in Oregon

The interpreters in the Oregon Health Care Interpreter Registry primarily provide on-site interpreting in the greater Portland area.

Simply put, there are not enough interpreters in Oregon to provide all of the health care interpreting that is required

Our interpreters and support personnel are a dedicated and committed group of professionals who have made it their life's work to see that all LEP and 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,
Kenneth W. Houghtaling II NIC