

Chair Patterson, Vice Chair Hayden, and members of the committee,

My name is Clondy Navarro, and I have been working as a health care interpreter in the Portland area for 10 years. Many of our State's most vulnerable patients are those whose primary language is not English. For those people and their providers, the success of our healthcare system rests squarely in the hands of interpreters. We work elbow-to-elbow with medical providers in the exam rooms, the ER, the operating room, home hospice, Cardiology, Chemotherapy, births, and deaths. However, in my interpreting career, I've experienced lack of competitive rates and lack of work because interpreting agencies give more work to unqualified interpreters and/or bilingual individuals with inadequate training which makes it difficult to stay in the industry.

Agencies like LINGUAVA outsourcing American jobs since 2020. Linguava keeps operating labor costs low by hiring schedulers in Honduras and other employees overseas, meanwhile interpreters are not being paid a good hourly rate and never get increases. All the Linguava schedulers in Honduras make less than \$700 a month. This agency has deep pockets with government/state money from OHP/Medicaid appointments. These schedulers/customer services jobs should stay in the U.S. to contribute to lower the State's unemployment rate.

TELELANGUAGE is also an agency that hires unqualified and poor trained bilingual people as interpreters that are not even legally allowed to work in the United States.

I write this testimony in hopes you will vote YES on SB 584.

Oregon has established health equity goals, and a major problem in achieving those goals is that the vast majority of Medicaid/OHP appointments are served by unqualified interpreters and/or bilingual individuals with inadequate training. The largest interpreting service companies do not negotiate reasonable rates with interpreters nor ensure OHA-credentialed interpreters are sent to Medicaid/OHP appointments. This means:

Interpreters cannot afford the cost of ongoing training and certification

High industry turnover

Patients and providers are often served by well-meaning but inadequately trained individuals

The state pays more than necessary due to errors in communication, misdiagnoses, repeat appointments, no-shows, etc.

Supporting SB 584 will move the State toward greater health equity and save money by creating:

A scheduling and payment system that allows for direct contracts with interpreters will reduce State spending on third-party scheduling companies while allowing interpreters to earn industry-standard rates.

Interpreters will be able to invest in ongoing training and certification, professionalizing the industry while providing greater access to quality health care to the State's most vulnerable populations

Pair Providers with qualified interpreters for Medicaid/OHP appointments means less guesswork, fewer unnecessary tests being ordered "just in case," greater patient compliance, and fewer no-shows (all of which cost the State money)

Title VI and the HHS CLAS Standards stipulate that facilities receiving federal funds must provide interpreting services for providers that don't speak the same language as their patients. I interpret not because the law demands it but because I believe healthcare is a human right. The success of reaching Oregon's health equity goals relies on Oregon's interpreters. SB 584 will be a meaningful step in improving working conditions for interpreters and, thus, the quality of language access services and health outcomes for Medicaid/OHP patients

The Healthcare interpreter workforce issues directly contribute to a lack of language access in healthcare settings. The working conditions that healthcare interpreters face drive interpreters out of the profession, further straining language access in the state.

I appreciate your thoughtful consideration and urge you to vote “YES” on SB 584

Sincerely,

Clondy Navarro