

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

My name is Judith Gomez, and I have been working as a health care interpreter in the Portland area for 9 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 when a patient himself who has asked the front desk receptionist to request my services for the following up appointments for their treatment and the receptionist takes my information even though the request is sent to the company, the communication breaks and many times this never happens that is not best practices for the well being of the patient.

Another example is when I have to contract with 5 different interpreter companies in order to try to fill my day in work. The language companies hand pick to whom the long appointments can be assigned to so it's difficult to fill my schedule. There are times where I am lucky enough to get an appointment but this is not always the case. Sometimes I've had to drive 6-8 hours to get to appointments and get no reimbursement for mileage even when the appointment is canceled so I lose the entire day just driving without any pay.

Oregon has established health equity goals, and a major problem in achieving those goals is that the vast majority of Medicaid 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 appointments which makes it difficult to stay in the industry.

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

- 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

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

Thank you,