

FRamon Arredondo: Testimony

My name is Ramon Arredondo. I have been a Health Care Interpreter for over 7 years, and I live in Salem Oregon. I decided to be an Interpreter to help my community and help create positive change through providing language access to non-English Spanish speaking patients in the health care arena. Limited English Proficient individuals struggle the most in navigating the health care system and are the most vulnerable. As HCI's (Health Care Interpreters) we serve the most vulnerable and yet we are the most vulnerable workers in the Health Care System. We have no health care insurance, no benefits, and don't make a livable wage. I am disappointed SB 584 died this week as this was the vehicle addressing issues in the language access industry, because of something doesn't change then more and more interpreters are going to be leaving the field because we cannot negotiate for fair wages or have any basic human and workers right.

The working conditions that healthcare interpreters face drive interpreters out of the profession, further straining language access in the state. Health care interpreters do not make a livable wage. My experience dealing with contract negotiations with private language agencies is that the Coordinated Care Organizations (CCO's) which are the insurance companies just don't have the money for it. These Coordinated Care Organizations reported that they are not able to fill the vast majority of their appointments with OHA credentialed HCI's. I have talked to a lot of my patients, and I have heard hundreds of when a patient did not receive an interpreter or that they had a non-credentialed interpreter that was of no help in a health care setting.

It does not make sense to say the insurance companies don't have enough money for the HCI because the state does not hold these insurance companies accountable and has no system of check in balance to track where the money goes. This creates a lack of transparency on how much money the state is spending on health care interpreting language access.

We are here to request the legislature to allocate 2 million dollars to the Oregon Health Authority to build an online portal that will help interpreters collectively set their rates. This allocation will also go a long way in building towards Oregon's Health Equity goals by providing quality language access, which is mandated by federal law for entities receiving federal funding as well as save providers money by allowing them to directly contract with interpreters instead of going through a third party.

Investing in health care interpreter services is not only the right thing to do from a moral standpoint, but it can also lead to cost savings in the long run by reducing health care disparities and improving health outcomes. Health care interpreters are crucial to ensuring Oregon meets its health equity goals. We urge you to allocate two million to the Oregon Health Authority through the end of the session Christmas Tree for an online state-based portal and an interpreter retention fund.

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