

To: Senate Committee on Health Care
From: Sanjoy Dutt, Oregon Interpreters in Action
Re: Support for Statewide Health Care Interpreter Portal

Dear Chair Patterson, Vice-Chair Hayden, and members of the Committee,

My name is Sanjoy Dutt, and I have been interpreting Bengali, Hindi and Nepali since 2015. I needed money to make a living in the United States, and I spoke a few languages, so I discovered that using my language skills to assist my community in making important health-related decisions while also receiving compensation was a win-win situation. It is extremely satisfying to help people when they are at their most vulnerable.

Although most providers recognize the value of interpreters, some do not understand that there is a difference between being bilingual and being trained in interpreting, especially in a medical setting. It is critical for providers and staff to receive training on how to work with interpreters and vice versa. When providers do not understand a patient, they may send their probe in the wrong direction or order unnecessary tests. Furthermore, the communication barrier causes unnecessary follow-up visits and costly emergency room visits. In the absence of a certified medical interpreter, providers are forced to use a family member or uncertified interpreter who can misinterpret or influence the patient's decisions.

Language access companies give priority to non certified interpreters over state-certified interpreters because they can pay them less. Transparency is also an issue. Interpreters are unaware of the disparity between how much their services are billed and how much they are paid, and CCOs often sign non-disclosure agreements with language access companies so that we're unable to find out how much they're paying for our individual sessions.

Interpretation is a difficult task, and certified interpreters have to continue to hone their skills in supporting non-English speakers more effectively. But it's difficult to justify the extra cost of certification when it makes it more challenging to get appointments due to the exploitation of non certified interpreters by language corporations. We want to give our clients the best possible care outcomes, but we also want to be paid accordingly.

We need a direct payment and scheduling portal so that we can expand high-quality language access to those who need it while still being able to earn a living doing this important work.