

To: Senate Committee on Health Care  
From: Sandra Valdez, 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 Sandra Valdez, and I have been working as a Spanish health care interpreter since 2000. I decided to use my interpretation skills in the healthcare field because I have a passion for both languages and helping others. I believe effective communication is essential to ensure patients receive the best possible care and understand their treatment options. By using my interpretation skills in this field, I can bridge language barriers and facilitate clear communication between healthcare providers and patients, ultimately contributing to better health outcomes and patient satisfaction.

Knowing that the work I do provides peace of mind and security to the people who use my services is incredibly fulfilling and gratifying. Overall, it's a deeply rewarding feeling to know that I am contributing to the well-being and safety of those I serve. It reinforces my commitment to my role and motivates me to continue striving for excellence in my work.

Without proficient language interpretation, there is a higher risk of miscommunication between healthcare providers and patients. This can lead to misunderstandings about medical conditions, treatment plans, medication instructions, and other critical information. Language barriers can discourage patients from seeking healthcare or attending follow-up appointments, leading to delays in diagnosis and treatment. They may also experience difficulties navigating the healthcare system, such as scheduling appointments or completing paperwork. Language barriers can exacerbate cultural differences and misunderstandings between patients and healthcare providers, impacting the delivery of culturally competent care. Patients may feel marginalized or misunderstood, leading to decreased trust in the healthcare system. Overall, language barriers can hinder effective communication, compromise patient-provider relationships, and ultimately, diminish the quality of care received by patients whose first language is not English. It underscores the importance of providing language access services, such as professional interpretation, to ensure equitable healthcare for all individuals.

Some barriers that might prevent qualified interpreters from pursuing interpretation as a full-time career include:

- Income stability: Interpreting jobs can be inconsistent, leading to fluctuating income levels and financial uncertainty.
- Limited job opportunities: Depending on location and language proficiency, there may be a limited number of job opportunities available, especially for less commonly spoken languages.
- High stress levels: Interpreting in healthcare settings or other high-pressure environments can be mentally and emotionally taxing, leading to burnout and fatigue.

- Lack of benefits: Many interpreting positions, especially freelance or contract roles, may not offer benefits such as health insurance, retirement plans, or paid time off.
- Credentialing requirements: Some interpreting roles, particularly in healthcare, require specific certifications or credentials, which can be time-consuming and expensive to obtain.
- Work-life balance: Irregular hours, including nights, weekends, and holidays, can make it challenging to maintain a healthy work-life balance, especially for those with family or other personal commitments.

Agencies often fail to recognize the dedication of certified interpreters. They tend to prioritize hiring new "interpreters" (bilingual individuals) without certification, offering them extensive work hours simply to maintain them under contract. Despite the rigorous process of certification, agencies typically offer only a marginal increase in pay, usually just a dollar more. If you attempt to negotiate for higher compensation, they may ultimately stop contacting you for assignments.

A statewide scheduling and payment system is crucial for several reasons beyond just streamlining administrative tasks. Lawmakers should understand that such a system ensures fair and consistent compensation for interpreters, reduces administrative burden for agencies and interpreters alike, improves access to interpretation services for limited English proficient individuals across the state, and promotes accountability and transparency in the provision of language access services. Additionally, it can help standardize quality assurance measures, facilitate data collection for future planning and improvement efforts, and ultimately enhance the overall effectiveness and efficiency of language access services statewide.

With this system in place, I would have confidence in knowing that my work hours are stable and that my income is fair. This would motivate me to put forth maximum effort to continue my required education to provide high-quality services. Both providers and community members deserve the best.