

5 Feb 2024

Chair Patterson, Vice Chair Hayden, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Kara DeGiovanni, and I have been working as a health care interpreter in the Portland area for ten years. I also serve on OHA's Health Care Interpreter Program Development Committee. I have done significant research on the capacities and costs of a variety of pre-existing interpreter scheduling and billing portals (aka: Interpreter Management Systems). I write this testimony in hopes you will vote YES on SB 1578.

The State of Oregon has established health equity goals, and a major problem in achieving those goals is that nearly all Medicaid/OHP appointments requiring an interpreter are served by unqualified interpreters and/or bilingual individuals with inadequate training. Only 10% are served by OHA-qualified interpreters.

Supporting SB 1578 will move our state toward greater health equity AND save money. Adopting use of an Interpreter Management System (portal) can enable the State to:

- **Reduce State spending** on third party interpreter service companies
- **Compensate interpreters at living rates**
- **Professionalize the interpreting industry** by increasing interpreter retention rates and incentivizing interpreters to invest in training and certification and stay in the field
- **Prioritize OHA-credentialed interpreters** for both scheduled and on-demand appointments, whether those are in-person, telephonic, or video relay.
- **Create detailed, instant data reports on anything and everything related to state-funded appointments** requiring an interpreter. This includes spending, fulfillment rates, how many in-person v. telehealth, patient and provider satisfaction, and innumerable other reports.
- **Allow health systems, hospitals, and clinics to spend less than half the time they currently spend requesting interpreters**

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 at their patient. I interpret not because the law demands it but because I believe health care is a human right, and the success of reaching Oregon's health equity goals relies squarely on Oregon's interpreters. SB 1578 will be a meaningful step in improving working terms for interpreters and, thus improving the quality of language access and health outcomes for OHP patients. I appreciate your thoughtful consideration and urge you to vote "YES" on SB 1578.

Sincerely,

Kara DeGiovanni, M.S.
OHA Certified Spanish Interpreter
OHA Health Care Interpreter Program Committee member
Oregon Interpreters in Action member