

Submitter: Miriam Romero
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Health Care
Measure: SB1578

February 6, 2024

TESTIMONY OF MIRIAM L. ROMERO, OREGON INTERPRETERS IN ACTION
SB 1578

Dear Senate Health Care Committee,

My name is Miriam L. Romero and I am a Spanish/English Medical Interpreter in Central Oregon. I had been working as a medical interpreter for the last four years. Before I took the interpreting training, I volunteered 166 hours as an interpreter at Volunteers in Medicine Clinic in Bend Oregon where 90% of their patients are Limited English Proficiency patients (LEPs). In addition, I also volunteered as an interpreter at the massive vaccination COVID clinics in the Deschutes County during the pandemic. Although I started as a volunteer interpreter for the COVID clinics, I eventually was hired as an interpreter and outreach coordinator for the Deschutes County Health Services. I interpreted in most of the COVID clinics and did outreach in the community to reach out the minorities groups and to provide updated information about COVID in their own language. From the last 10 years that I'd been interpreting for the LEPs, I'd seen how crucial interpreters are. While my colleagues interpreters and I were interpreting at the massive vaccination COVID clinics, the Deschutes County Health Services and the Bend's Mayor recognized that our job as interpreters was crucial during COVID clinics. While I was working for the COVID clinics at the Deschutes County Health Services, I felt that my job was secured. However, once the funds for COVID were gone so was my interpreter job.

As an Oregon Health Care Interpreter who has helped the Limited English Patients to access the health system, I strongly urge you to support SB 1578

SB 1578 will direct OHA to establish and maintain an online scheduling and billing system that allows the State to pay interpreters directly for state-funded appointments. It will give Health Care Interpreters a say in rates, mileage reimbursements, and cancellation policies by giving us the ability to collectively negotiate a contract directly with the State of Oregon. It will Establish a Healthcare Interpreter Retention Fund to keep interpreters in the profession, and it will have a team responsible for outreach to supplement the online system.

As Oregon Health Care Interpreters, we have no protections when we take jobs through LSPs. Plus, the current system limits access to competent interpreters for speakers of minority languages in Oregon. Ultimately, low wages and poor working

conditions make it difficult for the state to ensure that interpreters who have met minimum state requirements are able to cover state-funded appointments. In Oregon, interpreters are available to Medicaid patients who need them less than 6% of the time compared to 87% in Washington.

Dear Senate Health Care Committee, I urge you to pass SB 1578 measure. SB 1578 will not only protect the Oregon Health Care Interpreters' work environment, but also will ensure that more qualify Medical interpreters are available to cover the state-funded appointments for LEPs. According to The 1964 Civil Rights Act and the Affordable Care Act, people with limited English abilities should receive reasonable accommodations and access to language assistance services from medical institutions that receive federal funding.

Thank you for considering my petition!

Sincerely,

Miriam L. Romero