

Chair Patterson, Vice-chair Hayden, and members of the Senate Committee on Health Care:

The American Federation of Teachers – Oregon is eager to submit testimony in support of Senate Bill 1578. My name is Andrea Haverkamp, and I am writing on behalf of our labor organization representing 18,00+ education workers across the state of Oregon. Our membership is diverse, speaking, reading, researching, and writing in many languages, and we know the importance of access to education, instructors, and materials in primary language.

Our members and students similarly depend on interpreting services when they are seeking health care. They deserve access to credentialed interpreters who have met state requirements whenever possible in accordance with state law.

Oregon has established health equity goals. A major problem in achieving those goals is that the vast majority of Medicaid and other state-funded appointments are left unfilled or are served by unqualified interpreters and/or bilingual individuals with inadequate training. Unfortunately, access to interpreters has been reported in only 5.6%<sup>1</sup> of encounters where interpreting services were needed. The largest interpreting service companies do not negotiate reasonable rates with interpreters nor ensure OHA-credentialed interpreters are sent to Medicaid appointments. The results of this are that:

- Interpreters do not receive sufficient compensation to afford ongoing training and certification.
- High turnover within the healthcare interpreter industry.
- Patients and providers are therefore served by well-meaning, but inadequately trained, individuals.
- The state pays more than necessary due to errors in communication and costly misdiagnoses, repeat appointments, no-shows, and more.

SB 1578 will help realize Oregon’s health equity goals and save money across our healthcare system.

- A scheduling and payment system that allows for direct contact with interpreters will reduce State spending on third-party scheduling companies while allowing interpreters to earn living wages.
- Interpreters will be able to invest in ongoing training and certification, professionalizing the industry while providing greater access to quality health care to the State’s most vulnerable populations.
- Pairing Providers with qualified interpreters for state-funded appointments means less guesswork, fewer unnecessary tests being ordered “just in case,” greater patient compliance, and fewer no-shows (all of which cost the State money).

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<sup>1</sup> 2022 CCO Performance Metrics Dashboard, accessed 2-7-2024 via <https://visual-data.dhsoha.state.or.us/t/OHA/views/CCOPerformanceMetrics/performance?%3Aembed=y&%3AisGuestRedirectFromVizportal=y>

The success of reaching Oregon's health equity goals relies on Oregon's interpreters. SB 1578 will be a meaningful step in improving working conditions for interpreters and, thus, the quality of language access services and health outcomes for Medicaid patients.

On behalf of AFT-Oregon, we urge your support and *Yes* vote for SB 1578.



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