



A STRONG VOICE FOR OREGON'S WORKERS

To: Chair Patterson
Vice-Chair Hayden
Members of the Senate Committee on Healthcare

FR: Tan Perkins, Oregon AFL-CIO

RE: SB 1578 Support, Healthcare Interpreters

February 7th, 2024

The Oregon AFL-CIO represents over 300,000 working Oregonians and their families. Our state has continued to grow more and more diverse, especially in the past 10 years. OPB reported that “more than 750,000 Oregonians speak a language other than English at home and nearly 40 percent of that population say they do not speak English very well.” This means that the demand for interpreters is incredibly needed in Oregon.

At the same time, the majority of healthcare interpreters in Oregon work as independent contractors with for-profit language service companies. They receive no healthcare and, oftentimes, no mileage reimbursement when interpreters travel far lengths. This has contributed to the high turnover of interpreters in the state, which means folks are left without proper interpretation during important medical conversations. For all intensive purposes healthcare interpreters are employees and deserve to be treated as such.

The Oregon Health Authority adopted health equity as one of its core values, and we believe that this bill clearly helps OHA address that value. Language access is a key piece of a healthy, thriving population in our state. No one should be in a medical situation without the ability to fully understand what is being discussed, or suggested about healthcare decisions. And no healthcare worker should be without adequate pay and benefits for such important work.

We strongly ask you to support SB 1578.