

Submitter: sarah comerford
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Health Care
Measure: SB1578

Greetings Chair Patterson and members of the Senate Healthcare Committee,

My name is sarah comerford, they/them pronouns, and I am a professional sign language interpreter specializing in the field of healthcare, practicing in Oregon's Willamette Valley.

Interpreting is an emerging practice profession that is in dire need of regulation and reform. That is precisely why this body passed the recent legislation for sign language interpreter licensure in Oregon. Like licensure, this legislation stands to be an important public investment in translators and interpreters of all language pairs, and for those most vulnerable Oregonians who depend on our services to access their healthcare.

Presently in order for translators and interpreters like myself to provide services to our communities, we are obliged to contract as freelancers with language referral companies. Many reputable agencies invest in their practice professionals communities, but unfortunately not all agencies are made equal. By some estimates, despite the growing need for interpreters and translators nationwide, my professional community suffered from a 22% rate of professional attrition in the last year, with practitioners primarily citing reasons like the increasing costs associated with maintaining private practice, as well as elevated levels of stress, burnout, and vicarious trauma experienced in the field (Chen, 2023; Tabor, 2023).

SB 1578 is a meaningful step in improving the working conditions for healthcare interpreters in the state of Oregon by utilizing a state-operated portal system -- a tactic that has already been proven to improve appointment fill rates in other states with similar programs. Such a system reduces State spending on third-party scheduling companies while allowing interpreters to earn living wages and negotiate terms that are culturally appropriate to their communities. Simultaneously, the other provisions in this bill will result in increased accountability for service providers, better infrastructure to access meaningful continuing education, and overall improved professional stewardship for all of Oregon's language professionals.

This bill is a win-win for practitioners and the people who depend on our services. I urge you to vote yes on SB 1578 and support the hundreds of health care interpreters like myself continuing to provide for our families and communities.

Thank your consideration.

References:

Chen T. (2023) The interplay between psychological well-being, stress, and burnout: Implications for translators and interpreters. *Heliyon*. 2023 Jul 22;9(8):e18589. doi: 10.1016/j.heliyon.2023.e18589.
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10404948/>

Tabor, J. (2022) Trends in the language services industry: Turnover and attention economy, *go.proz.com*. Available at: <https://go.proz.com/blog/turnover-and-attention-economy> (Accessed: 07 February 2024).