

To: Senate Committee on Health Care  
From: Awaz Muhamad, Oregon Interpreters in Action  
Re: Support for Statewide Health Care Interpreter Portal

Dear Chair Patterson, Vice-Chair Hayden, and members of the Committee,

My name is Awaz Muhamad, and I am a Kurdish/Arabic interpreter with over 25 years of experience. My community is in extreme need of qualified medical interpreters, and I want to be able to help people who have limited English proficiency (LEP) get the care they need.

I feel happy and accomplished when helping the LEP patients communicate their medical conditions and needs to the provider and receive the care they deserve. With quality interpretation services, LEP patients can answer the provider's diagnostic questions clearly, follow up with treatment plans, and contribute to the healing process. Language barriers may have a great impact on the level of care the LEP patients receive. Without a qualified interpreter, their health outcome could be at risk or affected. I have been informed that some patient's appointments got canceled due to unavailability of interpreters.

I have heard from many patients in my community about their experiences with low-quality interpretation or unqualified interpreters. For example, one patient told me that they spoke English better than the interpreter that was assigned to their appointment. Another patient shared that the interpreter did not interpret everything said by him or the provider. Another patient complained by saying that the interpreter asked the patient's family member to do or help with the interpretation. Another patient expressed concerns about her health records being compromised or shared by untrained or unqualified interpreters.

LEP patients deserve to receive quality care through trained and qualified interpreters who can continue their profession with better pay and benefits. Under the current system of working through language access companies, interpreters are paid at low rates, we get little or no compensation for travel and mileage, no healthcare or retirement benefits, and we have to cover our own certification and continuing education expenses. These challenges often result in the loss of interest in the interpretation profession and forces people to search for a job with a higher pay or more stability.

Working directly with the state will ensure a higher pay rate and probably compensation of travel and mileage expenses. This would motivate me to accept more appointments regardless of distance. Also, communication with the state could result in more accurate billing.