

Subject: Position is Neutral for SB 1578

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

Oregon Health Care Interpreter Association (OHCIA) cannot fully support or oppose the proposed SB 1578. We are remaining neutral.

OHCIA has seen an improvement since HB 2359 passed, which has allowed advancement of the healthcare interpreter profession and improved health outcomes in Oregon. We have also heard from interpreters that their wages have increased, working conditions have improved, and satisfaction has improved. We expect the improvements will continue. It takes time for change of such a large magnitude.

Since HB 2359 passed, we have received support from different CCOs to ensure we have adequate funding to train interpreters. OHCIA is one of few nonprofits that provides low-cost training and continuing education. We have been training 300 interpreters annually. Most interpreters receive full scholarships, and all have access to case managers. A case manager's role is to assist in navigating the path to qualification and certification. We are proud of our work and will continue to serve interpreters.

As an association that represents the interest of interpreters and provides training, we appreciate the spirit of the proposal.

- To uplift interpreters and remove barriers for them.
- To ensure that working conditions improve for interpreters.
- To ensure interpreters are fairly compensated for their vital work.
- To stop the attrition in our profession

Several parts of SB 1578 are attractive. OHCIA sees the vision of a portal and embraces a system that would help interpreters. We want to see interpreters earn a decent living and have successful careers. We support interpreters completely. SB 1578 attempts to focus on these issues.

OHCIA would like a clearer vision of this portal before supporting SB 1578. It would make sense to continue working on a concept such as SB 1578, before it goes to the rules committee.

Some of the issues we see with the proposed bill are:

- Strict compliance with CCOs and hospitals would not be as accurate, which could cause risk to the hospitals and patients. Individual interpreters would be required to obtain and fund high insurance limits and prove continuous compliance for annual training, vaccinations, medicare exclusion, background, etc. If individuals were uploading into

portals, there would be inadequate oversight. Having compliance officers verifying each document is essential.

- Hospitals and CCOs count on complying with the Joint Commission audits. To do so, all compliance items must be readily available. It helps with the mandate that only Certified, Qualified interpreters of any language (or, in the case of ASL interpreters - Licensed) will be working with the patients.
- Questions about the Independent contractor status. To remain intact for freelance interpreters according to IRS regulations if the state sets rates, requires particular protocols, training, requirements, billing and reporting procedures.
- Payment to interpreters. In the past, the State of Oregon has tried different billing protocols for freelance interpreters, including centralized and decentralized scheduling. There were issues with interpreters getting paid in a timely and accurate manner.
- OHA and the CCO's have implemented reporting requirements. This requires careful data input and, with the portal, could cause additional complexity if individual interpreters were responsible for inputting the data in a timely manner in the correct formats.
- For successful provisioning, interpreter schedulers assist during emergencies at all hours. Many companies work 24/7. Will funding for schedulers during nights, weekends, and holidays be considered? In the past, the State has utilized several different scheduling systems (for ASL interpreters), and problems for the Deaf community ensued. The department wasn't staffed 24/7, or adequately staffed, and it was difficult for emergency appointments or last-minute cancellations to be considered. Hospitals, healthcare entities, and private providers have chosen to work with language access companies instead.
- Although there has been support for a "non-profit" to fill this need, there isn't sufficient evidence that enough organizations meet the criteria to avoid a "monopoly" by the one or two non-profit language organizations in Oregon. It would be a huge endeavor and risk for the State of Oregon to set up a portal without further consideration regarding the "profit vs. non-profit" status. The simple fact that a non-profit organization has that status doesn't mean the interpreters will be compensated at a higher level, nor the non-profit is ready to serve at the capacity needed for a streamlined system that would enrich the lives of the interpreters, provide qualified interpreters, and streamline the process.
- Since the portal will only work with OHA-qualified interpreters, this bill may ensure that there are no onsite interpreters for languages not represented on the registry. When a hospital transitions to working with the portal and requests a Palauan interpreter. The patient will have no onsite interpreter. This will happen with other community members whose languages are not represented in the OHA registry yet.
- Licensure with American Sign Language interpreters is different than with spoken language interpreters. Currently, most of the Certified and Qualified healthcare interpreters in the state hold several National certifications, State of Oregon certification, as well as the temporary Oregon licensure. In the past, the Deaf,

Deaf-Blind, Hard of Hearing, and Late Deafened communities have faced barriers to services. Now, services are much improved and licensure will provide the needed oversight.

- Clinics and hospitals have frequent turnover of staff, and the Language Access companies have provided (at no cost) training and constant account management working side by side with the organizations. The portal/OHA will need to provide this ongoing training to hospitals, clinics, etc.

Interpreters care about the community and in following the part of the original Hippocratic oath, “first do no harm” want to provide the best services. Due to the unanswered questions and situations that need more information presented above, we must remain neutral now.

Thank you so much for considering all the above points. We appreciate being part of the solution for the State of Oregon.

Regards,

The OHCIA Board