

March 21, 2025

Rep. Tawna Sanchez, Cochair
Sen. Kate Lieber, Cochair
The Joint Committee on Ways and Means Road Show Hearings:
Mount Hood Community College

RE: Support Healthcare Interpreters

Cochairs Sanchez and Lieber and members of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means, For the record, Sanjoy Dutt, and I am writing to draw your attention to the critical situation facing Oregon's healthcare interpreters—professionals who serve as vital bridges between providers and limited English-speaking patients. The passing of SB 1578 in 2024 offered a beacon of hope, signaling a commitment to support the essential work interpreters do. Yet much of that promise remains unfulfilled.

Healthcare interpreters are more than language conduits; they are lifelines. They ensure that patients are accurately heard and understood, allowing providers to offer appropriate care without costly misunderstandings, redundant imaging, repeat visits, or unnecessary ER trips. Yet, despite their indispensable role, interpreters remain some of the most undercompensated and overlooked workers in the healthcare system.

Most interpreters operate as independent contractors. They do not receive health insurance, paid time off, or retirement benefits. They are required to invest in ongoing education, certification fees, and professional development to maintain the high standards expected of them. Still, their compensation is dictated by third-party agencies—intermediaries who operate with little to no transparency. These language companies determine job distribution and pay rates behind closed doors, while interpreters are left in the dark about how much of the money paid by CCOs for services actually reaches them.

Interpreters had placed great hope in the state's proposed scheduling and transparency portal, expecting it to level the playing field and improve working conditions. However, that hope has been dashed. We now understand that the funds earmarked for the portal were redirected, and the project has been delayed by years. This setback further entrenches the current power imbalance—intermediaries continue to profit, while interpreters shoulder the burden.

Today, more than 1,500 healthcare interpreters in Oregon find their livelihoods controlled by just a handful of language service companies. Many seasoned interpreters are being forced to leave the profession—some to pursue other careers, others to become trainers—due to low pay and lack of basic protections.

Given these circumstances, I urge the Senate Committee on Health Care to take meaningful action. Specifically:

- **Mandate a standardized minimum two-hour pay for all healthcare interpreting appointments**, whether conducted remotely or on-site.
- **Provide free access to required training and continuing education** for independent interpreters.
- **Establish a yearly bonus or financial support** to help cover the expenses independent contractors incur—expenses that would typically be covered by an employer.

Diffused language interpreters, in particular, face even more instability, as the scope of work in their languages doesn't guarantee even 20 hours of work per week.

It's time we treated healthcare interpreters with the dignity and fairness their profession deserves.

Sincerely,

Sanjoy Dutt
Healthcare Interpreter
Oregon AFSCME member

