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OREGON HOUSE DEMOCRATS

For Immediate Release
Jun 17, 2021

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Oregon House Votes to Remove Barriers to Quality and Accessible Health Care Interpretation and Translation Services

House Bill 2359 B will ensure health care providers have adequate and accessible translation and interpretation services for limited-English Proficiency (LEP) patients and patients with hearing loss

SALEM, OR—Today the Oregon House voted in support of legislation that will expand access to adequate and comprehensive interpretation and translation services for limited-English Proficiency (LEP) patients and patients with hearing loss.

Under [House Bill 2359 B](#), health care providers would need to work with registered health care interpreters and translators. The bill would also require the Oregon Health Authority (OHA) to provide educational training for interpretation and translation service workers.

“When we have insufficient or unqualified health care interpreters, we put entire communities at risk,” said [Rep. Andrea Salinas](#) (D-Lake Oswego), one of the bill’s chief sponsors. “The lack of current enforcement mechanisms available to the state means that patients have little recourse should a provider not work with an interpreter at all and instead rely on family members, oftentimes children, to translate. This causes trauma, furthers divisions between individuals and the medical community, and increases the likelihood of miscommunication, which could lead to poor health outcomes.”

Currently, federal law requires that any provider or health insurance company receiving federal assistance must provide LEP and hard of hearing patients with a qualified interpreter. Unfortunately, Oregon law does not hold health care providers nor health care interpretation service agencies accountable for working with unqualified or non-certified health care interpreters. As a result, many families face difficult barriers to quality care, lacking the resources needed to have complicated and personal health issues translated or interpreted appropriately. HB 2359 B removes these barriers so that LEP and patients with hearing loss receive quality services.

“This legislation is ultimately about making sure the needs of patients are met,” said [Rep. Ricki Ruiz](#) (D-Gresham), another chief sponsor of the bill. “We are working on improving equity in all

aspects of Oregon's health care system, to ensure that a person's background is never a barrier to accessing the care they need.”

[According to the Oregon Association of the Deaf](#) (OAD), over 186,000 Oregonians live with hearing loss and are frequently overlooked and underserved. OPB reported that the 2018 American Community Survey found “more than 750,000 Oregonians speak a language other than English at home and nearly 40% of that population say they do not speak English very well.” A state-wide survey conducted by the Oregon Health Care Interpreters Association in late 2020 found that 93.55% of respondents caring for limited language proficient patients required health care interpreters.

The bill will also create a complaint process for interpreters through the Bureau of Labor and Industries (BOLI) and allows BOLI to partner with the OHA to investigate claims. In order to professionalize the workforce, OHA is also required to work with the Oregon Council on Health Care Interpreters to offer free or low-cost training for interpreters to ensure quality and certification.

HB 2359 B, which passed 50-9, is now headed to the Senate for consideration.

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