Interpreters and Translators, Inc.

Public Hearing Testimony
Public Health Committee

February 20, 2015

PROPOSED H.B. NO. 5894: AN ACT INCREASING THE AVAILIBILITY FOR LICENSED MEDICAL INTERPRETERS FOR LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY PATIENTS

Interpreters and Translators, Inc. (iTi) is a small, woman and minority owned business located in Manchester Connecticut. iTi has provided language services to government agencies, hospitals and health care organizations for over 28 years. Proposed H.B No. 5894: An Act Increasing the Availability for Licensed Medical Interpreters for Limited English Proficiency Patients amends Sec. 18a-409i of the Connecticut General Statutes, recognizing the importance of onsite language services in acute care hospitals across the State. However, we are concerned with the phrase "licensed medical interpreters" in the title of the bill. Although this proposal **ensures** that Limited English Proficient (LEP) patients will be provided with interpreter services, it lacks a clear definition of the type of interpreter required to deliver services.

Simply being bilingual does not mean an individual is qualified to interpret in the medical setting. Healthcare organizations frequently use friends, family members, untrained bilingual staff, or bystanders who speak a common language to interpret. These "ad hoc" interpreters do not comprehend medical terminology, possess the high-level linguistic skills necessary to interpret, or understand the cultural nuances of medical interpreting and are therefore more likely to commit errors of clinical consequences. These interpreters are "prone to editing, polishing, omissions, additions, substitutions, volunteered opinions and confidentiality breaches."[1] Additionally, these interpreters' command of both English and the foreign language is not known, they have not had

[1] Gany, F., Kapelusznik, L., Prakash, K., Gonzalez, J., Orta, L., Tseng, CH., Changrani, J. (2007). The impact of medical interpretation methods on time and errors, *Journal of General Internal Medicine*, 22, 319.

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training on medical terminology and may have trouble remaining impartial when their opinions or priorities conflict with those of the patient."[2]

Qualified medical interpreters are those who have completed at least 40 hours of Medical Interpreter Training in accordance with the National Council of Healthcare Interpreters' Standards of Practice and are trained to enhance the doctor-patient relationship by providing meaningful access to quality services for racial and ethnic minority patients. Qualified interpreters that receive training are familiar with medical terminology and the healthcare system, are experienced cultural brokers (have the ability to mediate cultural differences when identified while interpreting), and possess superior linguistic ability that are assessed in a language proficiency examination.[3] These linguists, rather than ad hoc interpreters, have the experience necessary to render true and accurate interpretations. Nurses, Doctors and other medical professionals can be utilized as interpreters, but only if they also completed 40 hours of Medical Interpreter Training and prove fluency in English and their native language through a professional language assessment. The interpreter must manage the flow of communication and impartially interpret the dialogue between the doctor and the patient.

Rather than requiring "licensed medical interpreters" iTi suggests requiring "qualified medical interpreters." These qualified interpreters have completed a nationally recognized Healthcare Interpreter Training Program that adheres to the standards set forth by the National Council on Interpreting in Health Care, or are interpreters who have been properly vetted by a professional Language Service Company. Requiring a licensed or certified interpreter severely limits the pool of interpreters as there are only a handful of interpreters in Connecticut that have passed the National Healthcare Interpreter Certification Test from either the Certification Commission for the Healthcare Interpreter (CCHI) or the National Board of Certification for Medical Interpreters (NBCMI).

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[2] Flores G. (2006). Language barriers to health care in the United States, *The New England Journal of Medicine,* 355(3), 231.
[3] National Council on Interpreting in Healthcare. (2011). National standards for healthcare interpreter training. Retrieved from http://www.ncihc.org/ethics-and-standards-of-practice, 12-15

Additionally, the test is only offered in certain languages that may not correspond with the demographics of Connecticut's population. Using qualified interpreters will set the standard for quality interpretation and enhance communication and the overall patient experience at Connecticut's acute care hospitals.

iTi would be happy to work with the members of the Public Health committee to answer any questions regarding language services and to amend the language of Proposed Bill H.B. No. 5894 so that quality language services are provided to all patients.

Thank you.

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