

Multi-Agency Letter to DSHS regarding Medical Interpreter Certification for Speakers of Indigenous Languages

To the DSHS Language and Testing Certification Program,

We represent several healthcare, educational, and community organizations in Whatcom and Skagit counties who are trying to source interpreters in indigenous Meso-American languages of limited diffusion such as Mixteco and Ahuacateco, among others. The lack of interpreters in these languages is a crisis that is contributing to health disparities, and is causing distress among patients and providers alike with the potential for tragedies in emergency situations

In Whatcom County, there are exceedingly few or zero medical interpreters available to serve these growing populations. People are going without interpretation in both routine and emergent situations. Meanwhile, we have a large population of bilingual and trilingual people from which we could seek candidates, and there are multiple scholarship and grant opportunities to train these candidates.

We are aware that the state no longer conducts this testing itself; however, while attempting to assist candidates through the process of certification as it now exists, we have discovered that there is currently no viable path available to speakers of such languages. The documentation required by CCHI, NBCMI, and ALTA to prove proficiency in Mixteco and other indigenous Meso-American languages is an obstacle that we have not been able to overcome. Such documentation does not exist in LLD, and proficiency cannot be proved through testing as there are no proficiency tests available for Mixteco or most other LLD available anywhere in the country.

The need for interpreters is immediate. The lack of options available to candidates from the most marginalized communities, which also happen to be those communities most in need of competent interpretation, is a matter of equity. We believe the situation amounts to a systemic barrier that the state has the obligation to correct. Please do so by requiring that the companies you contract with provide alternative ways of proving proficiency in LLD.

Sincerely,

Aimee Day, Co-Owner, North Sound Language Equity and Access Planners

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