

January 25th, 2021

From: Missouri River Health

Re: – In Favor of SB 2205



Madam Chair Lee, esteemed committee members

My name is Gabriela Balf and I am a psychiatrist in a small private practice in Bismarck. We are writing to salute the introduction of bill 2205 regarding reimbursement of interpreter services for Medicaid patients who have limited English proficiency or require sign language interpreters.

Access to healthcare in the preferred language is a human right (Constitution of WHO 7/22/1946) and a legal right in US (Title VI, 42 USC sec 2000d) (2016)

Especially in mental healthcare, it is critical that patients benefit from qualified medical interpreters, instead of relying upon family members or friends. Besides the ulterior motives that these family/friend translators may have, they may not be proficient in medical knowledge or able to provide necessary cultural interpretations.

On the other hand, especially in areas where interpreter services may be scarce like in North Dakota, their cost, added to the operating costs of a small practice, becomes rapidly prohibitive. Medicaid reimbursement is insufficient to cover those costs.

Private physicians accepting Medicaid payments are increasingly rare in psychiatry, as national surveys indicate: only 33% younger psychiatrists participate in Medicaid managed plans, as compared to 93% who participate in group commercial plans, due to the lower reimbursement rate (Benson et al 2020).

We salute the relief that will be provided by this measure, as our desire is to serve all the members of our community.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Balf" followed by a stylized arrow pointing to the right.

Thank you for your consideration,

Gabriela Balf-Soran, MD, MPH for Missouri River Health, Bismarck, ND