

My name is Michelle Atchison, MD and I am an ophthalmologist and practice owner of Eye Consultants of North Dakota, located in Fargo, ND. I am writing to provide testimony in support of HB 2205.

I see many patients in my office that are covered by ND Medicaid. Many of these patients are children with sight-threatening conditions that require interpreter services in order for me to effectively communicate with the children and their parents. I also see many adult patients with potentially blinding conditions that require interpreter services. It is essential for the safety, health and vision of my non-English speaking patients that I am able to communicate effectively with them.

Medicaid does not currently reimburse the cost of the medical interpreter for our patients. For my small practice, this creates a significant financial burden and potential barrier to care. I would like to provide a few specific recent examples from my clinic.

1. Interpreter directly billed our clinic \$50 for interpreter services. The patient requiring the interpreter never showed up to our clinic, yet we were responsible to pay this bill resulting in an overall loss for our clinic.
2. Interpreter directly billed our clinic \$100 for interpreter services. Our clinic submitted a claim for medical services provided totaling \$280. We received \$90.88 in total for this patient encounter, resulting in a net loss of \$9.12.
3. Interpreter directly billed our clinic \$191 for services and mileage from Grand Forks. Our office billed \$350 for services provided for this patient. We were paid a total of \$145.91 for this patient encounter. After paying the interpreter, our net loss for this visit was \$45.09.

As a physician, I want to continue to provide care for the Medicaid population in our state, but as a business owner this is not sustainable financially. I am concerned that the lack of reimbursement for interpreter services has created a barrier to care access for patients requiring interpreter services. I appreciate your time and consideration, and thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.