
SUBSTITUTE SENATE BILL 5995

State of Washington

68th Legislature

2024 Regular Session

By Senate Labor & Commerce (originally sponsored by Senators Saldaña, Valdez, Kauffman, Trudeau, Hasegawa, Keiser, Kuderer, Nguyen, Nobles, and C. Wilson)

1 AN ACT Relating to creating a professional license for spoken
2 language interpreters and translators; amending RCW 43.24.150; and
3 adding a new chapter to Title 18 RCW.

4 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

5 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.** (1) The legislature finds that the United
6 States census reported that between 2015 and 2019, over 1.5 million
7 Washington state residents over the age of five, approximately 20
8 percent of the state's population, spoke a language other than
9 English at home, and that in 2019, according to the Washington state
10 office of the superintendent of public instruction, 12 percent of the
11 state's total primary and secondary education student population
12 identified as English learners.

13 (2) The legislature finds that an inadequate number of
14 individuals available to provide interpreting services to injured
15 workers and medicaid enrollees with limited English proficiency
16 potentially increases the liability risks for health care providers
17 and negative health outcomes for these patients.

18 (3) The legislature finds that businesses and government agencies
19 across Washington need access to professional language services to
20 ensure their customers and clients with limited English proficiency
21 can have meaningful access to participate in the programs,

1 activities, and services offered by businesses and government
2 agencies.

3 (4) Therefore, the legislature intends to create a professional
4 licensing program for spoken language interpreters and translators to
5 protect consumers and help meet the needs of all Washingtonians who
6 require interpreting and translating services.

7 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 2.** The definitions in this section apply
8 throughout this chapter unless the context clearly requires
9 otherwise.

10 (1) "Advisory committee" means the advisory committee on
11 interpreting created in section 10 of this act.

12 (2) "Department" means the department of licensing.

13 (3) "Director" means the director of the department of licensing.

14 (4) "Interpreter" means an individual who interprets spoken
15 languages and is licensed by the department of licensing.

16 (a) "Medical interpreter" means an interpreter who is licensed by
17 the department who has received a medical endorsement.

18 (b) "Social services interpreter" means an interpreter who is
19 licensed by the department who has received a social services
20 endorsement.

21 (c) "Licensed certified interpreter" means an interpreter who is
22 licensed by the department who has passed an exam of the individual's
23 oral transfer skills in at least two of the following modes of
24 interpretation: Simultaneous, consecutive, or sight.

25 (d) "Licensed authorized interpreter" means an interpreter who is
26 licensed by the department who has passed an exam of the individual's
27 oral transfer skills that were tested in the sight and consecutive
28 modes through back translation.

29 (5) "Licensed translator" means a translator who translates
30 spoken languages on written documents and is licensed by the
31 department.

32 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 3.** The department must:

33 (1) Adopt rules necessary to implement this chapter;

34 (2) Establish reasonable examination, licensing, and renewal fees
35 for spoken language interpreters and translators licensed under this
36 chapter;

37 (3) Develop and administer examinations for licensure under this
38 chapter, subject to section 4 of this act;

- 1 (4) Establish forms and procedures necessary to administer this
2 chapter;
- 3 (5) Beginning January 1, 2029, issue licenses to applicants who
4 have met the department's requirements for obtaining a license and
5 deny licenses to applicants who do not meet the requirements;
- 6 (6) Compile and maintain a current list of interpreters and
7 translators licensed by the department;
- 8 (7) Provide staffing and administrative support to the advisory
9 committee created in section 10 of this act;
- 10 (8) Determine which states, if any, have credentialing
11 requirements equivalent to those of this state, and issue licenses to
12 applicants credentialed in those states without examination;
- 13 (9) By July 1, 2029, adopt rules for licensure renewal, including
14 for approval of continuing education activities licensees must
15 complete as part of the individual's license renewal;
- 16 (10) Establish by rule the procedures for an appeal of an
17 examination failure;
- 18 (11) Establish by rule the procedures for revoking licenses
19 issued pursuant to this chapter and the procedures for an appeal of a
20 revocation decision; and
- 21 (12) Periodically evaluate language access within the state to
22 ensure Washingtonians are able to participate in the programs,
23 activities, and services offered by businesses and government
24 agencies.

25 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 4.** (1) Initially, the department must adopt
26 the tests created by the language and testing certification program
27 at the department of social and health services under RCW 74.04.025
28 as the examinations. The department may update any examination only
29 after consulting with the advisory committee created in section 10 of
30 this act.

31 (2) The department must administer examinations of applicants for
32 licensure as a licensed certified interpreter in at least the
33 following languages: Cantonese Chinese, Mandarin Chinese, Korean,
34 Russian, Spanish, and Vietnamese.

35 (3) For languages in which the department does not offer
36 certification licensure, the department must administer examinations
37 to applicants for licensure as a licensed authorized interpreter.

1 (4) At a minimum, the department's licensure for certified and
2 authorized interpreters must provide for a medical or social services
3 endorsement.

4 (5) For applications for licensure as a licensed translator, the
5 department must administer examinations in at least the following
6 languages: Cantonese Chinese, Mandarin Chinese, Korean, Russian,
7 Spanish, and Vietnamese.

8 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 5.** Nothing in this chapter will be construed
9 to prohibit or restrict the provision of spoken language
10 interpretation and translation services by individuals who are
11 providing services within their authorized scope of practice and who
12 are licensed, certified, qualified, authorized, or registered under
13 other laws of this state including, but not limited to, chapters 2.43
14 and 28A.183 RCW and RCW 28A.410.271.

15 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 6.** Beginning January 1, 2029, it is unlawful
16 for any individual:

17 (1) To act or hold themselves out as a licensed interpreter or
18 use the title of "licensed interpreter," unless the individual holds
19 a valid license under this chapter, except if the individual is
20 currently authorized under chapter 2.43 or 28A.183 RCW or working as
21 a bilingual employee under RCW 74.04.025; or

22 (2) To act or hold themselves out as a licensed translator or use
23 the title "licensed translator" unless the individual holds a valid
24 license under this chapter.

25 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 7.** (1) Individuals holding an active
26 certification from the certification commission for healthcare
27 interpreters or by the national board of certification for medical
28 interpreters are eligible for the relevant licensure under this
29 chapter without taking an examination.

30 (2)(a) Other than individuals included in (b) of this subsection,
31 if an individual has an active interpreter or translator credential
32 issued by the department of social and health services prior to
33 January 1, 2029, the individual is eligible for the relevant
34 licensure renewal under this chapter before the expiration date of
35 the individual's current credential without examination.

36 (b) Individuals who received a credential issued by the
37 department of social and health services based solely on having

1 submitted a passing score on a written exam administered by the
2 certification commission for healthcare interpreters or the national
3 board of certification for medical interpreters are not eligible for
4 the relevant licensure renewal under this chapter without passing the
5 department's examination.

6 (c) Individuals who have an active certification by the
7 department of social and health services in Cambodian or Laotian are
8 eligible for renewal under this chapter as a licensed certified
9 interpreter before the expiration date of the individual's credential
10 regardless of whether the department is offering certification in
11 Cambodian or Laotian.

12 (3) By July 1, 2028, the department of social and health services
13 must transmit to the department all materials related to interpreters
14 and translators certified and authorized by the department of social
15 and health services, as requested by the department.

16 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 8.** (1) The director must establish, by rule,
17 the requirements and fees for renewal of a license issued pursuant to
18 this chapter.

19 (2) At a minimum, the requirements for license renewal must
20 include:

21 (a) Completion of continuing education or training, including on
22 ethics; and

23 (b) Renewal of the license after a four-year period.

24 (3) Failure to renew the license invalidates the license and all
25 privileges granted by the license.

26 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 9.** (1) The department, the department of
27 social and health services, the administrative office of the courts,
28 the professional educator standards board, and the office of the
29 superintendent of public instruction may collaborate and share data
30 as necessary to carry out the licensure requirements of this chapter.

31 (2) By January 1, 2025, the department of social and health
32 services must transmit all data, materials, and technology from its
33 language testing and certification program to the department,
34 including examination materials from prior to March 1, 2020, except
35 that any materials for bilingual employee examinations in compliance
36 with RCW 74.04.025 do not need to be transmitted.

37 (3) The department must post online a resource page that includes
38 links to information that must be maintained by the relevant state

1 agency on the number of requests for spoken language interpreter
2 services that went unfilled for the department of social and health
3 services, the department of children, youth, and families, the health
4 care authority, the department of labor and industries, and the
5 procurement process in RCW 39.26.300.

6 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 10.** (1) A licensed interpreter and translator
7 advisory committee is created within the department on July 1, 2025.
8 The committee consists of members in accordance with this subsection.

9 (a) Three members who provide spoken language interpretation or
10 translation services in Washington state and who:

11 (i) Prior to January 1, 2029, were certified or authorized by the
12 department of social and health services; and

13 (ii) Beginning January 1, 2029, are licensed by the department
14 under this chapter;

15 (b) One member from a community organization that provides direct
16 services to limited English speaking consumers;

17 (c) Two members who are a medical provider or represent
18 organizations who utilize state-paid interpreter services to provide
19 health care services to injured workers or medicaid enrollees;

20 (d) Three individuals representing an exclusive collective
21 bargaining representative of spoken language interpreters in the
22 state. The individuals may represent the same union;

23 (e) One member each from the Washington state office of equity
24 established in RCW 43.06D.020, the department of social and health
25 services, the health care authority, the department of labor and
26 industries, and the department of enterprise services;

27 (f) Two members representing a community and technical college.
28 One member must be from a college east of the summit of the Cascade
29 mountains and one member must be from a college west of the summit of
30 the Cascade mountains.

31 (2) The director must appoint all members of the advisory
32 committee. All members must be familiar with the practice of spoken
33 language interpreter services and able to provide the department with
34 expertise and assistance in carrying out the duties of this chapter.
35 The agency members under subsection (1)(e) of this section must be
36 appointed by their respective agency directors and then referred to
37 the department for appointment to the advisory committee. The members
38 under subsection (1)(f) of this section must be appointed by the
39 executive director of the state board for community and technical

1 colleges and then referred to the department for appointment to the
2 advisory committee.

3 (3) The department must consult regularly with the advisory
4 committee on issues related to interpreter and translator licensure
5 and renewal.

6 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 11.** The uniform regulation of business and
7 professions act, chapter 18.235 RCW, governs unlicensed practice, the
8 issuance and denial of licenses, and the discipline of licenses under
9 this chapter.

10 **Sec. 12.** RCW 43.24.150 and 2017 c 281 s 40 are each amended to
11 read as follows:

12 (1) The business and professions account is created in the state
13 treasury. All receipts from business or professional licenses,
14 registrations, certifications, renewals, examinations, or civil
15 penalties assessed and collected by the department from the following
16 chapters must be deposited into the account:

- 17 (a) Chapter 18.11 RCW, auctioneers;
- 18 (b) Chapter 18.16 RCW, cosmetologists, barbers, and manicurists;
- 19 (c) Chapter 18.145 RCW, court reporters;
- 20 (d) Chapter 18.165 RCW, private investigators;
- 21 (e) Chapter 18.170 RCW, security guards;
- 22 (f) Chapter 18.185 RCW, bail bond agents;
- 23 (g) Chapter 18.280 RCW, home inspectors;
- 24 (h) Chapter 19.16 RCW, collection agencies;
- 25 (i) Chapter 19.31 RCW, employment agencies;
- 26 (j) Chapter 19.105 RCW, camping resorts;
- 27 (k) Chapter 19.138 RCW, sellers of travel;
- 28 (l) Chapter 42.45 RCW, notaries public;
- 29 (m) Chapter 64.36 RCW, timeshares;
- 30 (n) Chapter 67.08 RCW, boxing, martial arts, and wrestling;
- 31 (o) Chapter 18.300 RCW, body art, body piercing, and tattooing;
- 32 (p) Chapter 79A.60 RCW, whitewater river outfitters;
- 33 (q) Chapter 19.158 RCW, commercial telephone solicitation;
- 34 ((and))
- 35 (r) Chapter 19.290 RCW, scrap metal businesses; and
- 36 (s) Chapter 18.--- RCW (the new chapter created in section 13 of
37 this act), interpreters and translators.

1 Moneys in the account may be spent only after appropriation.
2 Expenditures from the account may be used only for expenses incurred
3 in carrying out these business and professions licensing activities
4 of the department. Any residue in the account must be accumulated and
5 may not revert to the general fund at the end of the biennium.
6 However, during the 2013-2015 fiscal biennium the legislature may
7 transfer to the state general fund such amounts as reflect the excess
8 fund balance in the account.

9 (2) The director must biennially prepare a budget request based
10 on the anticipated costs of administering the business and
11 professions licensing activities listed in subsection (1) of this
12 section, which must include the estimated income from these business
13 and professions fees.

14 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 13.** Sections 1 through 11 of this act
15 constitute a new chapter in Title 18 RCW.

--- END ---