

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SB 5558

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As Reported by Senate Committee On:  
Human Services, Reentry & Rehabilitation, February 12, 2019

**Title:** An act relating to reinstating the authority of the department of social and health services and the health care authority to purchase interpreter services for applicants and recipients of public assistance who are sensory-impaired.

**Brief Description:** Reinstating the authority of the department of social and health services and the health care authority to purchase interpreter services for applicants and recipients of public assistance who are sensory-impaired.

**Sponsors:** Senators Saldaña, Darneille, Keiser and Nguyen.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:** Human Services, Reentry & Rehabilitation: 1/31/19, 2/12/19 [DP].

**Brief Summary of Bill**

- Reinstates the authority of Department of Social and Health Services and the Health Care Authority to purchase interpreter services on behalf of applicants and recipients of public assistance who are sensory-impaired.

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### SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES, REENTRY & REHABILITATION

**Majority Report:** Do pass.

Signed by Senators Darneille, Chair; Nguyen, Vice Chair; Walsh, Ranking Member; O'Ban, Wilson, C. and Zeiger.

**Staff:** Alison Mendiola (786-7488)

**Background:** Since 2012, the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) and the Health Care Authority (HCA) have had the statutory authority to purchase interpreter services on behalf of applicants and recipients of public assistance who are sensory-impaired.

In 2018, legislation was enacted that, in part, altered the procurement of spoken language services and allows spoken language interpreters to elect collective bargaining representation.

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*This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.*

This same legislation removed DSHS and HCA's authority to purchase interpreter services on behalf of applicants and recipients of public assistance who are sensory-impaired.

**Summary of Bill:** The Legislature finds recent legislation to alter the procurement of spoken language interpreter services and to allow spoken language interpreters to elect collective bargaining representation also removed the authority of DSHS to procure interpreter services on behalf of applicants and recipients of public assistance who are sensory-impaired. The Legislature intends to reinstate that authority.

The authority to purchase interpreter services on behalf of applicants and recipients of public assistance who are sensory-impaired rests with DSHS and HCA.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Not requested.

**Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members:** No.

**Effective Date:** The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect immediately.

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:** PRO: The bill before you is a legislative fix. Last year the Legislature passed a big bill on medical interpretation expanding opportunities for people in labor and industries to also have medical interpretation for spoken language and this is to recognize that across our state we have a lot of folks that are dual language or are recent immigrants and refugees. We want to make sure whether you speak Spanish, Russian, Vietnamese or Khmer—hundreds of languages that are spoken in our state—when someone is getting a service they have quality and accessible language translation that is culturally competent to help them make big life decisions, whether they are in a clinic or facing an injury. From the beginning, our intent was in working with the deaf and sensory community was to make sure that it was not impacted, they already have a system that works and our goals was to make sure that we kept that intact and whole. That is how we attempted to write the legislation last year, but in particular DSHS was interpreting it to possibly now make it difficult for them to continue the way that they always done it in this community, for applicants or recipient of public assistance. We are being extra careful which is why we have this clarifying language. If once this is implemented, it still does not fix the problem, just want to make sure that stakeholders know that we are committed to making sure this creates improvements, more access and more professional interpreters that can make a good living and provide a good service for our community. We do support this bill, but also believe a slight modification needs to be made. We suggest a fix that allows this for all of DSHS. HCA is currently under a settlement agreement with the Department of Justice with significant needs for improvement.

**Persons Testifying:** PRO: Senator Rebecca Saldaña, Prime Sponsor; Julia Petersen, Medical Interpreting Task Force.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying:** No one.