The Bilingual Endorsement Program for Physician Assistants

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Elizabeth Hernandez
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Dear Representative Hernandez,

I am a graduate student at the University of Illinois at Chicago's School of Public Health, studying health policy and administration and global health, and I am writing to you on behalf of the Bilingual Endorsement Program for Physician Assistants (BEPPA). BEPPA is working diligently in support of the amendment of section 15 of the Physician Assistant Practice Act of 1987, which would authorize the endorsement of qualified bilingual physician assistants in the state of Illinois.

As of 2007, 2,206244 individuals in Illinois spoke a language other than English at home, while 1,177,007 spoke English less than "very well." Executive Order 13166, enacted in 2000, called for "Improving Access to Services for Persons with Limited English Proficiency." Yet, language barriers and medical interpretation errors continue to plague the United States health care system, including that of Illinois. Limited English proficiency (LEP) individuals often access the health care system with no interpretative services or through the utilization of ad hoc interpreters. However, ad hoc interpreters average about 31 errors per clinical encounter, with 63% of these errors resulting in potential clinical consequences. Furthermore, language barriers and ad hoc interpreter errors result in high, unnecessary costs for our health care system, with some malpractice settlements being in excess of $71 million.

With your support, the amendment of section 15 would encourage the employment of bilingual physician assistants that can better serve both the English and non-English speaking populations of Illinois. Improved access to health care services through the endorsement of bilingual physician assistants will not only improve the health of limited English proficiency (LEP) individuals in Illinois, but it will also help reduce health care costs associated with language barriers and ad hoc interpreter errors.

Rep. Hernandez, you have worked hard to oppose anti-immigration bills in our state and to create better opportunities for immigrant families. With your help, we can also improve health care services to many of these same individuals that you have already fought so diligently for in the past. Thus, I would be honored to receive your support on this critical issue that ultimately affects all Illinois residents.

Thank you for your time, and I look forward to learning your position on this vital issue.

Sincerely,

Jessica Szafron