

Commissioner Amanda Fritz,  
Commissioner Nick Fish,

At several points during meetings of the Portland Utility Board (PUB), the subject of a bilingual/multilingual premium has been discussed. The following is the majority view of the Board.

To begin we offer some history of this issue, the City's recruitments routinely list phrases such as "Bilingual candidates are encouraged to apply", "Speak, read and write with fluency in one of the safe harbor languages", "The City of Portland values a diverse workforce and seeks way to promote equity and inclusion within the organization and with the public."

Bureau management has said there is a process to compensate "non-rep" employees for these specific skills but that process does not apply to represented employees. It is also unclear whether this practice is in line with the pay equity laws that took effect earlier this year.

We understand that represented employees have been citing a need for a "Second Language Program" and related premiums since at least 2010. Currently the practice is to make use of a translation line when assisting customers to which there is a language barrier. This translation line can be a particular challenge outside of an 'in person' setting. We also understand that employees of the city regularly speak, read, and translate in their workplace interactions both internal and external, with no financial recognition of the value they provide.

While we applaud the efforts in both hiring and outreach, it is reasonable to conclude that a lack of multilingual programs disproportionately affects employees of color and their communities. Further, this diminishes the bureaus standing at large with underserved communities and creates an unnecessary obstacle to community engagement.

The PUB strongly encourages you to insist that BHR and OEHR in conjunction with Portland's labor partners promptly convene a Second Language Work Group to address this obvious and glaring inequity.

We know Portland is an inclusive and welcoming city to all and value the continued conversation.