

# PORTLAND UTILITY BOARD

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Re: Premium Pay for Multilingual City Employees

Date: July 9, 2019

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 consensus 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."

The PUB is concerned that there is a process to compensate "non-represented" 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 bureau's standing at large with underserved communities and creates an unnecessary obstacle to community engagement.

The PUB strongly recommends that the Bureau of Human Resources and Office of Equity and Human Rights in conjunction with Portland's labor partners promptly convene a Second Language Work Group to address this obvious and glaring inequity in compensation and the need for clear, deliberate and thoughtful policy for implementation.

The PUB acknowledges that multilingualism is an important skill set and an asset in our increasingly diverse city. In order to build an inclusive community, it is critical to acknowledge this valuable skill set and provide adequate compensation for all City employees to effectively engage and support new and long-term residents alike. Portland strives to be an inclusive and welcoming city to all and we on the PUB value the continued conversation.