



Date: March 16, 2017

To: Oregon House Committee on Rules

From: Emily McLain, Government Relations Oregon Education Association

Re: Support for HB 2869, HB 2871, HB 2872

OEA represents over 44,000 members across the state of Oregon. Our members are educators working in pre-kindergarten through grade 12 public schools and community colleges. OEA's membership includes licensed teachers and specialists, classified/education support professionals (ESPs), community college faculty, retired educators, and student members.

Oregon's demographics have been changing rapidly. Educators across the state are increasingly teaching in schools where a vast amount of different languages are spoken by students and their families. Many Oregon voters do not speak English or English is not the language they speak every day at home. Take for example information from Portland Public Schools where they explain "Currently, the district has over 2,400 students who come from homes where about 60 different languages are spoken. These students represent about 36% of Portland Public Schools' total enrollment. Over 1,700 of these students are identified as English Language Learners."¹

In Beaverton, it is even more, the Beaverton School District website says that more than 93 languages are spoken by the student population.² One OEA member Robert Havrilla at Centennial High School in Gresham says there are over 43 languages in his classes ranging from Burmese (including both Karen and Zomi), Spanish, Russian Somali, Arabic, Vietnamese, Chinese, Ukranian, and Napali are just a few in his classes. In the David Douglas School District over 70 languages are spoken and when families go to use the website they can translate the information on the site into Chinese, Russian, Somali, Spanish, and Vietnamese.³

This paints the picture of the broad and diverse populations living in our state. Educators know the challenge of these language barriers well as we work to engage families in the educational process. We support these pieces of legislation because they take positive steps in the right direction to engage more Oregonians in the civic process and in our community.

Allowing for language information to be shared between agencies so that preferred language can be shared is a simple solution but one that would go a long way. Issues on the ballot can be very complicated and challenging to access. Allowing voters to access election information in their preferred language can make participating in voting much less intimidating and more accessible. We currently do not know all the different languages that voters speak. Allowing for data sharing to address this as well as letting voters note their native language and request materials in a language other than English could help engage more citizens in the electoral process.

¹ http://mlc.portlandschools.org/about/demographic_data

² <http://www.beavertonoregon.gov/List.aspx?MID=1630>

³ <https://www.ddouglas.k12.or.us/>