

Date: February 23, 2023

To: Senate Committee on Rules

From: Leslie Palotas, Community Connector at the Economic Development Alliance of Lincoln County and Juntos en Colaboración Team Member

RE: In Support of SB 612 and SB 911

Chair Lieber, Vice-Chair Knopp, and members of the committee,

My name is Leslie Palotas. I have been a part of the Juntos en Colaboración team in Lincoln County since the group was formed in 2020 to improve multilingual, COVID-responsive messaging and services. Before the pandemic, our County was fortunate to have multiple Nonprofits, Community Groups, and a School District that had built trust and relationships with families who speak Mam, an Indigenous Language spoken by more than 70 families in our rural community. After a COVID outbreak affected many non-English-speaking families, the Lincoln County Health Department relied on the knowledge and networks of these trusted groups to create audio and video messaging with the help of Mam-speaking community members, as the Mam dialect here isn't a written language. Multilingual Q&A zoom sessions with medical professionals, vaccination clinics, and even virtual cultural celebrations connected folks who spoke Mam, Spanish, and English to improve their understanding of and access to healthcare and social services. The collaborative efforts' [YouTube Videos](#) were shared across the west coast between communities that spoke the same dialect of Mam. Since 2020, this multilingual effort has extended into new community food gardens and community centers, based on the interests of our Mam and Spanish-speaking families. The organizations that benefit from multilingual efforts in our region know how important it is to pay interpreters adequately for their skills. The need for more professional Indigenous Language interpreters is evident. We have community members who could pursue well-paying careers to meet the needs of our region - if the State's credentialing system is improved to include their language. Passing SB 612 and SB 911 is a necessary step for the State of Oregon to meet our community's needs.

Mam is just one of the multiple Indigenous Languages spoken in Oregon. Multiple unique dialects of each language mean that a dialect of one language may not be understood by another community that speaks a different dialect of the same language. For example, when a national call-in interpretation service is used for an Indigenous Language, the interpreter may not be understood if they speak a different dialect. Therefore, more State level support is needed to improve local professional interpretation services for Oregon communities to understand their Indigenous Language speaking families' needs and improve equitable access to health, legal, social and emergency services.

Fortunately, Pueblo Unido's knowledge and statewide networks have identified specific barriers for Indigenous Language speakers in the State's current systems, and SB 612 and SB 911 were written to improve those systems. Because of the trust, relationships and networks Pueblo Unido has built, Oregon now has an opportunity to improve its systems to become more inclusive for over 35,000 Indigenous Language-speaking community members all across the State of Oregon. Legislators have this opportunity to improve Oregon's access to life-saving and

enhancing services, and to provide opportunities for Indigenous Language speakers to inform their community about their needs. I urge your support of SB 612 and SB 911 to improve Oregon's systems for Indigenous Language speaking families and the communities they live in statewide.

Gratefully,

Leslie Palotas (she/her/hers)

Community Connector

Economic Development Alliance of Lincoln County (EDALC)

