

Date: 2/28/2023

For: Senate Rules Committee

RE: Support for SB 612 y SB 911

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

I live in Forest Grove, and I am writing to support SB 612 and SB 911. Everyone deserves to understand and be understood, especially during some of life's biggest and most important moments.

The current systems lead to limited access to quality interpretation services for Oregon's Indigenous communities, sometimes resulting in Indigenous Oregonians being denied life-saving medical care, unable to access critical services, or being wrongfully imprisoned and deported.

When I was in High School, I struggled with the teacher because I didn't know English and Spanish. I was having bad grades in some classes due to the language barriers. The office of the school tried to find me an interpreter, but they ended up bringing someone who spoke a native language but not the same that I speak. There was also a situation where I had an encounter with the police, but it was hard to understand each other and to receive adequate help. I strongly believe that its best when an interpreter can help answer people's questions.

Over 35,000 Oregonians speak an Indigenous language as their primary language, but the current lack of Indigenous interpretation services too often leads to Indigenous Oregonians being denied life-saving care due to language barriers, an inability to access critical services, or imprisonment and deportation.

Thankfully, we have the opportunity to tackle this problem this session with SB 612 and SB 911.

SB 911 will establish a commission for Original Peoples from South America, Central America, and Mexico within the Oregon Advocacy Commissions Office, ensuring that the voices of Indigenous communities are represented in state government and have a direct voice in policy proposals that concern Indigenous Oregonians.

SB 612 will result in the development of language proficiency evaluation mechanisms for Indigenous languages, allowing interpreters to demonstrate their language skills and obtain formal credentialing. The bill will also allow Indigenous interpreters to be paid a living wage and prevent Indigenous Oregonians from being forced to pay for their own interpretation through a potentially unreliable or unqualified interpreter.

I urge your support of these important bills!

Sincerely,

Community member in Forest Grove