



Date: 2/28/2023

To: Senate Rules Committee

From: Adelante Mujeres

RE: Support SB 612 and SB 911

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

My name is Verónica Núñez, and I am the Leadership and Advocacy Director at Adelante Mujeres, which means “Women Rise Up”. Adelante Mujeres is a non-profit organization in Forest Grove. The agency has a rich history of successfully engaging low-income Latinx and immigrant communities by acting as a forum for community advocacy. Adelante Mujeres’ mission is to provide holistic education and empowerment opportunities to low-income Latina women and their families to ensure full participation and active leadership in the community. Our organization served over 15,000 individuals in 2022 with comprehensive and life-changing services—these services span from Educational, Microenterprise, Health Equity and Leadership programs.

Over 35,000 Oregonians speak an Indigenous language as their primary language, but currently there is a lack of quality interpretation services for those who speak languages that are Indigenous to what is modern-day Mexico, Central America, and South America. The lack of quality interpretation services, sometimes results in Indigenous Oregonians being denied life-saving medical care, unable to access critical services, or being wrongfully imprisoned and deported. For that reason, Adelante Mujeres strongly supports SB 612 and SB 911 because Everyone deserves to understand and be understood, especially during some of life’s biggest and most important moments.

Over the last four years, Adelante Mujeres has been facilitating listening sessions with community members in Washington County. Through those listening sessions community members have identified that language barriers for indigenous communities is a concern. At Adelante Mujeres we envision a community where all families thrive, but this is not possible when many indigenous communities who participate in our programs don’t receive adequate interpretation in the language they speak. Over the past five years we have provided case management for people who are recent immigrants and who identify as indigenous, and speak a native language. A good number of our community members have expressed frustration and stress when communicating with people on the bus, with the police, in schools and courts. We believe that a strong community requires the inclusion of everyone, for that reason, Adelante Mujeres supports SB 612 and SB 911.

Adelante Mujeres strongly support SB 612 and SB 911 because Washington County is not just the second biggest and most diverse county in the state but is also the home to many indigenous communities who speak Chuj, Maya, Mixteco, Purepecha, Q'anjolal, Quiche, Zapoteco, Mam and others. An estimate of 30% of the agricultural workers in Washington County are indigenous and around 40% of the people who do hand-harvest-labor in the county are or may be indigenous. These numbers reflect the need for indigenous language justice now. Also, according to the article *Oregon Indigenous Farmworkers Results of Promotor Intervention on Pesticide Knowledge and Organophosphate Metabolic Levels* shows that when people receive information in their native language, they retain the information better.

By centering the needs of those who have been most harmed by colonization and oppression, and who have the least access to our support systems, we make our systems stronger for all and begin to heal generations of harm. We believe that when indigenous communities thrive, it leads to a much healthier community for all. 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.

SB 612 and SB 613 will help address these important issues and ensure that Indigenous Oregonians have access to quality interpretation services. We ask that you show your full support to Indigenous communities from Mexico, Central and South America to ensure that we are putting those most impacted by injustices and inequities at the forefront. This is the time when we must embrace our Oregon values of justice and fairness.

I urge your support of these important bills!

Sincerely,

Verónica Núñez
Director of Leadership and Advocacy, Adelante Mujeres
vnunez@adelantemujeres.org