

DATE: February 28, 2023  
TO: Senate Committee on Rules  
FROM: Sammi Teo, Public Policy Advocate  
RE: Support for SB 612 and SB 911



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Chair Lieber, Vice-Chair Knopp, and Members of the Committee,

Oregon Food Bank's mission is to eliminate hunger and its root causes. We pursue this goal in two key ways: we foster community connections to help people access nutritious food today; and we advocate to change policies that drive hunger and poverty. We have the opportunity to rebuild and emerge stronger so that we can end hunger for good in our communities. This is our moment to embrace our shared values and take bold action in support of *all* Oregonians.

**Access to language interpretation can be the difference between whether or not a family has access to food assistance programs.**

Over 35,000 Oregonians speak an Indigenous language from modern day Mexico, Central America, and South America. However, many are unable to access quality interpretation services. This limited access too often results in delay or denial of life-saving medical care, inability to access critical services such as safety, public benefits, and social programs, and wrongful imprisonment, deportation, and family separation. These are devastating human rights violations that can be avoided or at the very least curtailed when Oregonians who speak Indigenous languages have access to quality interpretation services.

Oregon's inadequate supply of interpretation services is a result of a few specific factors:

- Limited funding and low pay for quality Indigenous interpretation services;
  - Many entities are hesitant to pay Indigenous interpreters fair wages because of a lack of funding, or due to a lack of credentialing (see point below). Too often, Oregonians who speak Indigenous languages do not receive interpretation because they or their service provider cannot afford it.
- Lack of a formal mechanism for Indigenous interpreters to demonstrate proficiency in an Indigenous language;
  - This is a significant barrier to interpreters being able to obtain the credentials needed to provide interpretation in healthcare or judicial spaces, or to advance their professional career.
- Lack of consultation with Indigenous communities in interpretation-related policy and funding discussions.

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**SB 612 and SB 911 would help us to take meaningful strides towards ensuring all Oregonians have the right to understand and be understood.**

SB 612 and SB 911 will address this shortage. 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 Oregonians who speak indigenous languages from being forced to pay for their own interpretation through a potentially unreliable or unqualified interpreter.

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 and 911 will help address these important issues and ensure that Indigenous Oregonians have access to quality interpretation services. This is why we urge your support of these bills. Thank you.

