

**Testimony Submitted by
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Oregon Consumer Justice
To the Senate Committee on Rules**

2/28/2023

Regarding: Support for SB 612 and SB 911

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

I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of Oregon Consumer Justice in support of SB 612 and SB 911.

Oregon Consumer Justice (OCJ) organizes, advocates, and supports litigation to advance a justice movement that puts people first, ensuring all have the freedom to thrive and equitably share in our abundance of resources. For too long, flawed systems and economic policies that favor profits over people have stood in the way of this reality, with communities of color most often experiencing the most significant harm. Strengthened through responsive and reciprocal community relationships, OCJ is building a future where financial and business transactions can be relied upon as safe and where all Oregonians know and have recourse to exercise their consumer rights.

For many years, the Oregon Legislature has made meaningful strides toward ensuring all Oregonians have the right to understand and be understood. By creating new state programs and investing in quality interpretation services, the experience of many of those who don't speak English as their first language has dramatically improved in various settings.

Unfortunately, there remains a lack of quality interpretation services for those who speak the indigenous languages of modern-day Mexico, Central America, and South America. This results from a few specific and related 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 Indigenous interpreters are not paid a fair wage due to a lack of credentialing (see the point below). Too often, Indigenous Oregonians do not receive interpretation because they or their service provider cannot afford to provide it.
- The lack of a formal mechanism for Indigenous interpreters to demonstrate proficiency in an Indigenous language.
 - There are significant barriers to interpreters obtaining the credentials needed to provide interpretation in healthcare or judicial spaces or to advance their professional careers.
- A lack of consultation with Indigenous communities in interpretation-related policy and funding discussions.

More than 35,000 Oregonians speak an Indigenous language that originate from modern-day Mexico, Central America, and South America as their primary language. Still, Indigenous Oregonians are being denied life-saving care, an inability to access critical services, or imprisonment and deportation due to language barriers and the current lack of Indigenous interpretation services.

Thankfully, we can tackle this problem this session with SB 911 and SB 612. 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 develop language proficiency evaluation mechanisms for Indigenous languages, allowing interpreters to demonstrate their language skills and obtain formal credentialing. This bill will also enable 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.

We urge your support of these important bills. Thank you for your consideration and your service to Oregon's communities.