



February 28, 2023

To: Senate Committee on Rules

From: Oregon Education Association

RE: Support SB 612 and SB 911

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

The Oregon Education Association represents over 41,000 educators and education service professionals across the state, from pre-k to community colleges. Our members are classroom teachers, bus drivers, custodians, teacher assistants, nutrition specialists, school counselors, community college professionals and more. We would like to express our support for SB 911 and SB 612.

For many years, the Oregon Legislature has made meaningful strides towards ensuring all Oregonians have the right to understand and be understood. Through the creation of new state programs and investments into quality interpretation services, the experience of many of those who don't speak English as a first language has dramatically improved in a variety of settings.

Unfortunately, there remains 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. This is the result of a few specific and related factors:

- Limited funding and low pay for quality Indigenous interpretation services,
- The lack of a formal mechanism for Indigenous interpreters to demonstrate proficiency in an Indigenous language,
- A lack of consultation with Indigenous communities in interpretation-related policy and funding discussions;

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 some important next steps and solutions through 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 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.

Oregon Educators, students and their families deserve to be served by the full scope of state services when they are needed, which includes language proficiency mechanisms and an ability to access language interpretation when it is needed. Our districts and schools have a process to support students on individualized education plans (IEPs) and language interpretation is part of that process. Just as we believe it is fundamental human right to understand and be understood, we see these bills as important next steps to live out our values as a state.

OEA urges your support of these important bills!

Sincerely,

Michele Ruffin
Government Relations Consultant
Oregon Education Association