



Date: February 28<sup>th</sup>, 2023  
To: Senate Committee on Rules  
From: Jennifer Parrish Taylor, Director of Advocacy and Public Policy for the Urban League of Portland  
Re: Support for Establishing an Indigenous Language Justice Fund, SB 612

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

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Senate Bill 612. My name is Jennifer Parrish Taylor, and I am submitting this testimony on behalf of the Urban League of Portland. The Urban League of Portland is one of Oregon's oldest civil rights and social service organizations, empowering African Americans and others to achieve equality in education, employment, health, economic security, and quality of life across Oregon and SW Washington.

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. 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 it.
- The lack of a formal mechanism for Indigenous interpreters to demonstrate proficiency in an Indigenous language, which 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.
- 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. Everyone deserves to understand and be understood, especially during life's most difficult and important moments. It's critical to our collective prosperity that all Oregonians have access to interpretation services if and when they need them. Our statewide systems must meet the needs of our communities and be available in languages that they understand in order to be truly effective. Increased access to interpretation services for Oregonians who speak Indigenous languages from present-day Mexico, Central America, and South America helps ensure that our communities can effectively interact with service providers and public entities and participate in society visibly and fully. 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.



**Urban League**  
of Portland

*Empowering Communities. Changing Lives.*

Indigenous language interpreters have unique skill sets that are highly valuable to our communities and state as a whole; by investing in Indigenous language interpreters, we can continue to build a more equitable Oregon.

In passing Senate Bill 612, it 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. The approximate 35,000 Oregonians who speak an Indigenous language as their primary language are counting on you.

Respectfully,

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