



February 28, 2023

To: Chair Lieber, Vice Chair Knopp, and Members of the Senate Committee on Rules  
Re: Senate Bill 612 – Support

Chair Lieber, Vice Chair Knopp, and Members of the Committee. For the record, my name is William Miller (Blackfeet/ Cherokee) and I have the honor of serving as the Executive Director of the NAYA Action Fund. Founded by the community, for the community, the NAYA Action Fund is a 501(c)(4) social welfare organization with a mission to expand political advocacy and build electoral power in partnership with the Native community in Oregon and Washington. Our vision of systemic change is youth centered, family driven, and elder guided. I write in support of Senate Bill 612 which establishes the Indigenous Language Justice Fund for purposes related to supporting Indigenous languages interpretation throughout Oregon.

Historically, the American Indian/Alaska Native community has been disenfranchised in the educational system. In 1879, the Carlisle Indian School was established, creating the first ever off-reservation federal school. During the boarding school era, our people were forced to speak English, their hair was cut, and they were forced to assimilate into white mainstream society, among many other atrocities. For reference, the term, “kill the Indian, save the man,” came from this era. These policies forced our communities to press on through strength, culture, and tradition. The purpose of these boarding school policies was to remove the Indigenous child from their families and to assimilate them, all while prohibiting them from passing on Indigenous ways of knowing and doing, including language.

The creation of the Indigenous Language Justice Fund would allow our communities the opportunity to reclaim and safeguard traditional languages. Cultural preservation and access are vital to the visibility of an often-invisible community. The bill, if passed, would create the Indigenous Language Justice Fund while affording the opportunity to nonprofit organizations to serve as the fiscal agent of those funds. Over 35,000 Oregonians speak an Indigenous language as their primary language, but the current lack of Indigenous interpretation services continues to lead to many Oregonians being denied life-saving care due to language barriers, an inability to access critical services, or imprisonment and deportation.

The NAYA Action Fund works in community to secure protections, provide opportunities, and increase the advancement of those most impacted by policy. This session, I hope you join us in providing additional cultural preservation opportunities for Indigenous communities. It’s with this in mind that I write on behalf of the NAYA Action Fund, urging the passage of SB 612.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "William Miller", is positioned above the typed name.

William Miller  
Executive Director