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Senate Committee on Rules

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Testimony in support of SB 612 and SB 911

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

On behalf of the Oregon Law Center, please accept this testimony in support of SB 612, which establishes the Indigenous Languages Fund, and SB 911 which creates the Commission for Original Peoples of South America, Central America, and Mexico.

The Oregon Law Center (OLC) is a state-wide non-profit law firm whose mission is to achieve justice for low-income communities of Oregon by providing a full range of the highest quality civil legal services. OLC is committed to efforts designed to remove systemic barriers to safety, stability, and security for our client communities. SB 612 and SB 911 will help ensure that our client communities have more equitable access to key resources, services, and justice in a language they understand.

One of the communities we serve is the migrant and seasonal farmworker population. Apart from the legal services we provide, OLC's Farmworker Program also conducts outreach to farmworkers and provides critical information on their rights, available resources, and referrals. Many farmworkers we encounter in the fields and in community settings speak Mesoamerican indigenous languages such as Mam, Mixtec, Zapotec, Purepécha, and Nahuatl. Language access in the form of quality interpretation services is a key part in ensuring farmworkers can access services in a language they understand. The lack thereof results in Indigenous Oregonians potentially being denied life-saving medical care, unable to access critical services, or being wrongfully imprisoned and deported.

Thankfully, we have the opportunity to tackle this problem this session with SB 911 and SB 612.

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.

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.

Everyone deserves to understand and be understood, especially during some of life's biggest and most important moments. We thank this committee for your time and attention on this important matter and we urge your support for SB 612 and SB 911.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.