

Date: February 28, 2023
To: Senate Committee on Rules
From: Virginia Garcia Memorial Health Center
RE: Support SB 612 and SB 911



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

On behalf of Virginia Garcia Memorial Health Center, I am writing to you in support of SB 612 and SB 911. As a federally qualified healthcare center, we have seen how limited access to quality interpretation services has created hardships for our indigenous communities in accessing critical services, resulting in significant barriers to receiving high quality, culturally appropriate health care.

Virginia Garcia is the largest non-profit community health center in Oregon serving more than 50,000 individuals across Washington and Yamhill counties in 18 clinics with a special emphasis on migrant and seasonal farmworkers. Our patients speak more than 60 different languages. We work every day to address and remove the barriers that prevent our patients from receiving the care they need.

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. For many years now we have heard staff and patients concern around interruption services for indigenous languages. Unfortunately, the adequate interpretation needed is very hard to find.

Over 35,000 Oregonians speak an indigenous language as their primary language. The lack of indigenous interpretation services often leads to indigenous Oregonians being denied life-saving care due, an inability to access critical services, or imprisonment and deportation.

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.

We urge your support of these important bills.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gil Muñoz". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "F" at the end.

Gil Muñoz, CEO
Virginia Garcia Memorial Health Center