



A STRONG VOICE FOR OREGON'S WORKERS

TO: Chair Lieber
Vice-Chair Knopp
Members of the Senate Rules Committee

FR: Catie Theisen, Oregon AFL-CIO

RE: SB 612, SB 911 Indigenous Language Justice Support

February 28, 2023

The Oregon AFL-CIO represents 300,000 workers across Oregon and is a voice for all workers in the legislative process. SB 612 and SB 911 take an important step at making sure that all Oregonians – regardless of the language they speak – can access critical state services in a language they clearly understand.

1 in 8 workers in Oregon is an immigrant¹ -- many of whom continued to work round-the-clock during COVID-19 to keep food on our tables, to care for our loved ones, and to keep our economy running. But Oregonians who are immigrants and refugees continue to face barriers to accessing state services because of a lack of services in languages other than English, or even Spanish.

Indigenous language interpreters – specifically those who speak languages of what is modern-day Mexico, Central and South America – do exist, but because there are not recognized certification methods and communities are not meaningfully engaged, they are under utilized and under compensated for their labor.

Over 35,000 Oregonians speak an Indigenous language of modern day Mexico, Central and South America as their primary language, but the current lack of Indigenous interpretation services too often leads to Indigenous Oregonians being denied life-saving care s, an inability to access critical services, or imprisonment and deportation.

SB 612 addresses this by creating 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. Coupled with SB 911, which will establish a commission for Indigenous Peoples from South America, Central America and Mexico, this will create critical programs while also meaningfully engaging the impacted communities long-term.

These bills are a continuation of the work that the Oregon Legislature has already done towards ensuring all Oregonians have the right to understand and be understood.

We encourage your support of SB 612 and SB 911 and look forward to continuing to partner with you to make sure that all Oregonians can meaningfully and equitably access critical state services.

¹ <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/immigrants-oregon>