

Submitter: Emily Clark Cuellar
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Rules
Measure: SB612

Dear Members of the Senate Committee on Rules,

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. However, there remains a lack of quality interpretation services for those who speak Indigenous languages. I understand that this is the result of a few related factors: 1) 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, Indigenous Oregonians do not receive interpretation because they or their service provider cannot afford it. 2) 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.

Over 35k 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. As an attorney who represents low and moderate income Oregonians in family court, I know how critical it is for people to have access to interpretation services to protect their rights and the rights of their children in the judicial system. I have seen first hand how integral good interpreters are to the function and fairness of our justice system. Moreover, everyone deserves to understand and be understood. It's critical to our collective prosperity that all Oregonians have access to interpretation services if and when they need them. I urge you to pass SB 612.