

ROGUE ACTION CENTER

Date: March 2nd, 2023

To: Senate Committee on Rules

From: Dana Greenblatt, Rogue Action Center

RE: Support SB 612 and SB 911

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

My name is Dana Greenblatt and I am a policy advocate at the Rogue Action Center (RAC). We are a community based non-profit working to address economic and social issues in the region and make Southern Oregon a more liveable place for everyone. Our work is rooted in the understanding that everyone deserves to have their needs met and thrive in the cities/towns where they live and that community members should be a part of shaping the policies that impact their lives. **The RAC endorses SB 612 and SB 911 and believe that these bills will bring Southern Oregon and communities across the state closer to these goal.**

The ability to understand and be understood are critical to ensuring that people are able to get their needs met and have equal access to services. For many years, 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.

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. **Over 35,000 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.**

This severe shortage is the result of **limited funding and low pay for quality Indigenous interpretation services, the lack of a formal mechanism for Indigenous interpreters to demonstrate proficiency in an Indigenous language, and a lack of consultation with Indigenous communities in interpretation-related policy and funding discussions.**

Thankfully, we have the opportunity to tackle this problem this session with SB 911 and SB 612. **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 you to join us in supporting these important bills and which will make long overdue strides towards increasing access for indigenous community members across the state.

Sincerely,

Dana Greenblatt
Rogue Action Center