



To: Members of the Joint Committee on Transportation

From: Pat Garrett, Sheriff Washington County
On behalf of the Oregon State Sheriffs' Association

Date: May 18, 2023

Re: Re: HB 2951-1; Testimony In Support Of Spanish Driver's Education Grant Program

Co-Chairs McLain and Frederick and members of the Committee,

For the record, my name Pat Garrett, I am the Washington County Sheriff, and I strongly support HB 2951-1, which would allocate \$500,000 to Centro Cultural, a Washington County based nonprofit, to begin a Spanish driver education program.

Increasing rates of licensed drivers makes our roads safer. As of January 1, 2021, people in Oregon are no longer required to provide proof of legal presence or citizenship to acquire a driver's license. However, for many in our Latino community, socio-economic obstacles and fear of government remain barriers to licensing.

According to the Oregon Department of Transportation, the rate of test failure for people who took the written test in Spanish was 23% higher than the rate of test failure for those who took the test in English owing to poorly translated driving test questions. All Oregonians deserve to have opportunities to learn the rules of the road and I strongly believe we have an obligation to help those who have been systematically left out of opportunities to legally drive.

Unfortunately, there is a severe lack of opportunity for people who speak Spanish as their primary language to enroll in traffic safety education courses because the vast majority of these programs are English based. That is why I am urging you to pass and fund HB 2951-1, which would set up a targeted pilot program to provide Spanish language driver education courses to Washington County residents.

As a general rule, police issue citations to drivers who are unlicensed. A suspended license can follow if the driver does not appear in court.¹ Some jurisdictions offer programs to excuse the citation once the driver becomes licensed.² Data strongly suggests Latino drivers in Washington County have higher rates of driving unlicensed than other drivers. According to the Statistical Analysis Center of

¹ A driver's license cannot be suspended for failure to pay fine, HB 4210 (2020).

² Washington County Justice Court provides an opportunity for a driver to have their "driving without a license" citation dismissed, provided the driver obtains a license within a certain time after their court appearance.

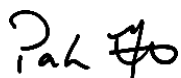
the Oregon Criminal Justice Commission, the Washington County Sheriff's Office issued citations to Latino drivers at a disproportionate rate over the last three years and did not do so for drivers from Black, Indigenous and other communities of color. Similar disproportionate levels of citations were issued to Latino drivers by other police agencies, including the Oregon State Police and police departments from the cities of Eugene, Forest Grove, Hermiston, Hillsboro, Sherwood, and Tigard.

Centro Cultural is a well-established community-based organization located in Cornelius and Hillsboro that has spent over fifty years building relationships with the Latino and immigrant populations. The organization has provided educational opportunities to prepare participants to open businesses, complete GEDs, and develop careers. They have been a highly reliable partner for Washington County as a whole and for the Sheriff's Office. Fundamentally, this comes down to the need for trust. The Latino and immigrant community in Washington County feels secure participating in programs they operate. Centro Cultural is very well-equipped to meet the need for Spanish language driver education.

Establishing a pilot grant program to fund traffic safety education courses in Spanish will improve traffic safety, increase licensing rates, and expand equitable access for those most facing barriers to becoming licensed that contribute to disproportionate citations, arrests and/or searches of Latino drivers. Lessons learned from such a grant program could promote long lasting traffic safety and equity benefits that can serve as a model for other communities to increase the number of licensed Oregonians in Spanish speaking communities and for populations that speak other languages.

In closing, I urge you to support HB 2951-1 to improve traffic safety and equity. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I am happy to answer your questions.

Sincerely,



Sheriff Pat Garrett
Washington County