

Submitter: Monica Arce
On Behalf Of:
Committee: House Committee On Early Childhood and Human Services
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB2976

Chair Hartman, Vice-Chair Nguyen, Vice-Chair Scharf, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Monica M Arce, and I am a midwife at Virginia Garcia Memorial Health Center. I reside in Portland, Oregon, and work in Hillsboro, Oregon and I am writing to express my strong support for HB 2976.

As a healthcare provider working directly with diverse communities, I have witnessed firsthand the critical need for interpretation services, especially for the many patients who speak Indigenous languages. At our health center, we regularly serve patients who speak Indigenous languages from Mexico, Central, and South America. These patients often face significant barriers to accessing essential care due to language gaps, especially in situations as sensitive and urgent as childbirth and postpartum care.

It is clear to me that all Oregonians deserve to be understood and to understand the care they are receiving, yet many of the 50,000+ Indigenous language speakers in our state face challenges in accessing professional interpretation services. While interpreters are required to demonstrate proficiency through credentials, there are no formal language proficiency exams for many of the Indigenous languages spoken in Oregon. This creates a barrier to ensuring the highest standard of care for these patients and limits the availability of qualified interpreters in critical settings like medical visits, legal aid, and social services. My indigenous patients should not be forced to use Spanish as their second language, they should be able to get all the information and all the support every other patient gets from our services. Their life experience often times comes with trauma and not providing adequate language access serves to cause more trauma.

HB 2976 would address this gap by allocating funding to develop language proficiency evaluations, recruit qualified interpreters, and coordinate services across various state agencies and healthcare providers. This is vital not only for facilitating communication but also for ensuring equitable access to services for those whose languages and cultural needs are often overlooked.

I have seen the challenges my patients face when they cannot effectively communicate their medical concerns or understand their treatment options. Whether it's a prenatal visit or emergency care during labor, clear communication is vital to the health and well-being of both mothers and babies. HB 2976 is an essential step toward removing these barriers and ensuring that all Oregonians—regardless of their language—can access the care they need with dignity and respect. In a time when we are all trying to focus on decreasing maternal morbidity and mortality, especially amongst populations with barriers to care, this legislation is critical.

No Oregonian should be faced with language access barriers when seeking critical care or assistance. I urge your support of this important bill to close these gaps and improve healthcare access for everyone in our state.

Sincerely,

Monica M. Arce, CNM

Site Medical Director at Virginia Garcia Reproductive Health Clinic