



*Testimony in support of HB 2976 (2025)*

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

My name is Kate Suisman. I am an attorney at the Northwest Workers' Justice Project (NWJP). Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this important bill. We represent workers in low-wage jobs when bad things happen to them at work: when they are not paid, or are discriminated against for being in a protected class or are retaliated against for speaking up. Finally, we engage in policy advocacy and try to bring the important perspectives of workers in low-wage jobs and immigrant workers to these policy discussions.

NWJP strongly supports this bill. We have indigenous clients who need legal interpretation in their native language. Many times, our indigenous-speaking clients speak some Spanish, and it takes our staff time to realize that they in fact need to speak in their native language. When this happens, we look for interpreters in their preferred language, but often find a very limited pool of interpreters.

This limited pool can present a real issue when the interpreter may be part of a small community of people who speak that language, and may in fact know our client- this can make our client reluctant to share the whole story with their attorney. Other times, a client feels uncomfortable with an interpreter of a different gender than theirs, but again we may have a hard time finding someone of their gender, due to the small number of interpreters available in many Mexican, Central and South American indigenous languages.

The Legislature has the chance to do something about this problem, which is a grave problem for people needing the basic service of being able to speak in your chosen language about life's most important issues.

Personally, I have had indigenous clients who I thought I could represent well in Spanish, but I realized in each instance that I was doing my client a disservice by requiring them to speak to me in Spanish. Interpretation provides not only language access but also cultural competence that I, a non-indigenous person, cannot provide. One time an interpreter told me that in her culture, they did not use a lot of "yes or no" questions- that was incredibly helpful to me as I tried to understand the discrimination my client was alleging took place at her job.

Please support this bill that will dedicate state dollars to making sure indigenous-speaking interpreters can be recruited and retained. Indigenous languages need and deserve parity with non-indigenous languages. This bill takes a big step towards that overdue parity. Thank you.