

Submitter: Malin Jimenez
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,

For the record, my name is Malin Jimenez and I am an indigenous interpreter and a community leader. The languages that I speak are Akateko and Q'anjob'al. I am a member of the Collective of Indigenous Interpreters of Oregon, which Pueblo Unido convenes.

All Oregonians should have access to quality interpretation services when they need them. But there remain significant barriers to achieving this reality for the thousands of Indigenous language speakers in Oregon who are from present-day Mexico, Central, and South America.

During my time as an interpreter in the state of Oregon, as well as a Director for the Collective of Indigenous Interpreters of Oregon, I have seen some of these barriers firsthand.

Many entities are not familiar with the many different languages spoken by Indigenous Oregonians from present-day Mexico, Central, and South America. As a result, many entities are often unable to identify the language or variant for which interpretation is needed through no fault of their own. Even if the language can be identified, social service providers and state entities may not be able to find or access Indigenous language interpreters who are capable of accommodating their need.

These barriers can limit access to interpretation, and therefore essential services, for Indigenous Oregonians from present-day Mexico, Central, and South America.

At Cesar Chavez school for example, an Indigenous student was being bullied by his peers, and then one day he brought a knife to school. When the school found out, they suspended the student, and wanted to meet with the parents to discuss the situation. The school tried providing a Spanish interpreter, but the parent was still unable to communicate with the school because Spanish was not her primary language. It took the school multiple weeks to find me, an interpreter of the parent's primary language, Akateko. Once I was called to interpret, the mother was able to understand what happened, express her concerns to the principal, school administrators, and security, and consent to placing the student in a special program where they would receive additional support with their behavior. If interpretation had

been provided sooner, the student would have more promptly received behavioral support, which would have made both the student and their peers safer.

Here is another example. A few summers ago, an Akateko woman and her children experienced domestic violence by her husband, including threatening them with a knife. As you might imagine, this is already a stressful situation for anyone to experience, but it's even more so when a language barrier prevents you from being able to communicate with the advocates dedicated to assisting you.

Fortunately in this case, because of my experience as a community leader and organizer, I personally knew this woman, and she knew that I was an Akateko interpreter. She reached out to me directly for support, and I was able to help her communicate in her native language with a domestic violence advocate, who helped her and her children temporarily relocate to safe housing, access food assistance and other resources, and ultimately obtain a restraining order against her husband. However, if she had not already known me or reached out to me directly, she would not have been able to communicate with a domestic violence advocate, and may not have been able to find safety and support.

If funding was available to recruit and retain a qualified workforce of interpreters, and to coordinate appointments with those interpreters, our State would be better able to assist its constituents and make sure they get the services and support they need. HB2976 includes funding to do just that. We urge your support of HB 2976, to ensure language access for Indigenous communities in all settings in Oregon.

Sincerely,

Malin Jimenez