

Submitter: Byron Tzoc  
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 Byron Tzoc and I am an interpreter for the language of K'iche' which is one of the Mayan Languages. 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, I have seen some of these barriers firsthand, particularly in healthcare settings.

With limited exceptions, Indigenous interpreters can't be credentialed by the Oregon Health Authority as qualified healthcare interpreters because language proficiency evaluations don't exist for those languages. Because they can't be credentialed, Indigenous interpreters cannot be included on OHA's central registry of interpreters.

This results in hospitals and other medical providers conducting lengthy searches—sometimes without success—for Indigenous interpreters, which causes patients to wait a long time before they are able to communicate their ailments to medical providers, or understand the treatments that are prescribed to them.

Here's one real-life example: A pregnant woman who speaks the Mayan language Chuj as her primary language had a fetal anatomy ultrasound that revealed a time sensitive, life-threatening abnormality, which required that she see a specialist to review her options. However, two months passed before a Chuj interpreter was located and provided for her appointment, during which time the patient was unable to fully understand the findings of her ultrasound, review her options, or consent to further testing and procedures. But even the process of finding the interpreter after several months went outside of the much more efficient practice that Oregon has established to ensure that interpreters are qualified and credentialed. This ultimate delay jeopardized the health of both the patient and her unborn child. Moreover, due to the delay in finding an interpreter, the hospital was forced to dedicate significantly more resources towards coordinating urgent care.

HB2976 will help the State of Oregon eliminate such delays by supporting the creation of language proficiency evaluations for Indigenous languages. When Indigenous interpreters are able to demonstrate their language proficiency, they will then be able to become credentialed as qualified healthcare interpreters, and be listed on OHA's central registry of interpreters. Medical providers will therefore be able to find qualified interpreters of Indigenous languages more easily and quickly, and Indigenous patients will more promptly be able to communicate with their provider, review their options, and consent to treatment.

HB 2976 will help break down language access barriers for Indigenous Oregonians. We urge your support of HB 2976.

Sincerely,

Byron Tzoc