



Chair Hartman, Vice-Chair Nguyen, Vice-Chair Scharf, and members of the committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of HB 2976.

People make Oregon their home because they dream of what we all want - to live safely, care for their families, and contribute to their communities. Our state is enriched by the different experiences, cultures, and traditions that all of us bring to our neighborhoods and communities across Oregon.

There are over 50,000 Oregonians who are Indigenous to present-day Mexico, Central, and South America. Many only speak an Indigenous language from these regions, but just like other Oregonians, they sometimes need assistance accessing key services like healthcare or getting a driver's license.

Indigenous language speakers face significant barriers in accessing these types of services. With limited exception, some state entities require interpreters to be credentialed in order to provide services. To earn a credential, interpreters must demonstrate that they are qualified. In order to demonstrate qualifications, interpreters often must pass a language proficiency evaluation. Such evaluations do not exist for Indigenous languages from these regions. This makes it incredibly challenging for an Indigenous language speaker to get the services that they need.

HB 2976 would appropriate funds for the development of language proficiency evaluations for several of the most commonly spoken Indigenous languages from these regions. Funding would also be used to recruit and retain a qualified workforce, and to coordinate appointments across a variety of entities.

This bill will reduce language access gaps and ensure that all Oregonians can understand and be understood.

We urge your support of this important request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Isaura Peña".

Isa Peña

Director of Strategy - Innovation Law Lab