

February 28, 2023

Byron Lorenzo Tzoc Guarchaj

Support for Measure SB 612 and SB 911

Chair Lieber, Vice-Chair Knopp, and members of the committee,

My name is Byron Lorenzo Tzoc Guarchaj. I am working with Pueblo Unido PDX as the Coordinator of the Collective of Indigenous Interpreters of Oregon (CIIO).

Before starting to work with Pueblo Unido PDX, I was providing interpretation services in my Original Mayan Language of K'iche', Spanish, and English independently. There were many times when my services were required in a variety of settings. Unfortunately, there is still a lack of quality interpreting services for those who speak Indigenous languages in what is now known as Mexico, Central America, and South America. This is the result of some specific and related factors:

1. Unfair and very low payment, many of the entities that provide interpretation do not want to pay and recognize the time of the interpreters, which leads to people in need of these services being left without receiving their interpretation or, sometimes they assign them to Spanish interpreters because they assume that by the simple fact of speaking a little Spanish they can understand and communicate well. In many cases, people in need of interpretation are asked to find and pay for their own interpreter which is a violation of their rights. We all have the right to receive information in the language that we feel most comfortable with and to have an interpreter by our side.
2. Sometimes we as indigenous interpreters cannot provide our services to entities that request interpretation in Original Languages because they ask for interpreter credentials, but this cannot be applied to us because there are no credentialing exams in our Original Languages or a formal mechanism that demonstrates that we are competent to speak in our Indigenous Languages, which is a huge barrier for us to get credentialed to provide our services.
3. There is a need to consult with indigenous communities in policy discussions and funding related to interpreting, and it is time for our Indigenous communities are made visible, recognized, and heard.

More than 35,000 Oregonians speak an Indigenous language as their primary language, but the current lack of Indigenous interpretation services too often leads to Indigenous people in Oregon being denied vital care due to language barriers, the inability to access critical services or imprisonment and deportation.

Fortunately, we have the opportunity to address this issue in this session with the initiative of SB 612 and SB 911

SB 911 will establish a commission for Original Peoples from South America, Central America, and

Mexico within the Oregon Advocacy Commissions Office, ensuring that Indigenous communities are represented in government and have a direct voice in policy proposals that concern the indigenous communities in Oregon.

SB 612 will result in the development of proficiency evaluation mechanisms for indigenous languages, allowing interpreters to demonstrate their linguistic skills and obtain formal credentialing. The bill will also allow Indigenous interpreters to receive a living wage and will prevent Indigenous people in Oregon from being forced to pay for their own interpretation through an interpreter who is potentially unreliable or unqualified.

I ask for your support for these important bills!

Sincerely,

Byron Lorenzo Tzoc Guarchaj