



## Oregon moms and caregivers fighting for gender, economic, and racial justice.

Date: February 28, 2023  
To: Senate Committee on Rules  
RE: Support SB 612 and SB 911

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

Family Forward Oregon is in strong support of SB 612 and SB 911, which works to achieve quality interpretation services for those who speak languages that are indigenous to what is modern-day Mexico, Central America, and South America. Our organization works to strengthen the economic security of mothers, caregivers, parents, and families of all backgrounds through bold policy change. As members of the Fair Shot Coalition, we support this legislation as part of our ongoing effort for racial and immigrant justice in Oregon.

Currently, over 35,000 Oregonians speak an Indigenous language as their primary language. However, because Indigenous language interpreters are not paid adequately for their unique and highly valuable skills and face unnecessary barriers to credentialing, Oregonians who speak Indigenous languages are also facing tremendous barriers to participating in society. The lack of Indigenous interpretation leads to delay or denial of life-saving medical care, makes critical social programs and supports inaccessible, and can even result in wrongful imprisonment and unjust deportation and family separation.

While SB 612 and SB 911 will benefit all Indigenous language speakers in Oregon, women, mothers, and caregivers will uniquely benefit from the bill, especially within healthcare settings and in our immigration system. As of August, 2022, of the 1017 qualified or certified healthcare interpreters in Oregon, there are only two qualified healthcare interpreters who speak an Indigenous language. This staggering rate leads to devastating impacts for Indigenous language speaking Oregonians seeking general medical care and sexual and reproductive health care, especially during a time where reproductive freedom is under national attack.

Furthermore, Oregon's immigrants still remain very vulnerable to detention and deportation. Data from the Equity Corps of Oregon free legal aid program shows that of over 1,000 service users currently in removal proceedings in Oregon roughly 20% speak Indigenous languages from present-day Mexico or Guatemala. With the 20% estimate projected across all 110,000 undocumented immigrants in Oregon<sup>1</sup> more than 22,000 undocumented immigrants are likely to be Indigenous language speakers.

The Center for American Progress reports that maternal health, reproductive autonomy, and mental health are three of the critical areas of women's health that continue to be violated in

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/immigrants-oregon>

immigration detention<sup>2</sup>. We know that in our current immigration detention system, abuses of women's health and rights in immigration detention fall hardest on women of color, women with disabilities, low-income women, transgender women, and young women and girls.

SB 911 will:

- Establish a commission for Original Peoples from South America, Central America, and Mexico within the Oregon Advocacy Commissions Office, ensuring that the voices of Indigenous communities are represented in state government and have a direct voice in policy proposals that concern Indigenous Oregonians.

SB 612 will:

- Result in the development of language proficiency evaluation mechanisms for Indigenous languages, allowing interpreters to demonstrate their language skills and obtain formal credentialing.
- Allow Indigenous interpreters to be paid a living wage and prevent Indigenous Oregonians from being forced to pay for their own interpretation through a potentially unreliable or unqualified interpreter.

Every Oregonian deserves to understand and be understood, especially during life's most difficult and important moments. It's critical to our collective prosperity that all Oregonians have access to interpretation services if and when they need them. By doing so, we can continue being a place that values community and families staying together. [Family Forward Oregon urges your YES vote on SB 612 and SB 911.](#)

Sincerely,

Lisa Kwon  
Policy Manager  
Family Forward Oregon

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/immigration-detention-dangerous-womens-health-rights/>

