



February 28, 2023

Senate Committee on Rules  
Oregon State Legislature  
900 Court St. NE  
Salem, OR 97301

**RE: Testimony in Support Senate Bill 612 and Senate Bill 911**

Dear Chair Lieber, Vice-Chair Knopp, and members of the Senate Committee on Rules,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of the American Civil Liberties Union of Oregon (ACLU of Oregon). The ACLU of Oregon is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving and enhancing civil liberties and civil rights, with more than 28,000 supporters statewide. **We strongly support Senate Bill 612 and Senate Bill 911, which would ensure the representation and inclusion of our Indigenous communities that speak Indigenous languages in policy making and in our state agencies, health, and judicial spaces.**

At the ACLU of Oregon, we believe in the preservation of civil rights and civil liberties for all people, including our communities who speak languages that are Indigenous to modern-day Mexico, Central America, and South America. To protect Indigenous people's rights, it's necessary that everyone has access to interpretation services to ensure there is comprehensive communication between the state and communities. However the state of Oregon currently lacks the infrastructure to provide proper interpretation services in Indigenous languages, which creates a discriminatory barrier to our state's services, agencies and judicial processes.

**In the judicial system, our Constitution promises all criminal defendants a fair trial – but the Constitution's promise is meaningless when a defendant's right to liberty is determined by a trial that is incomprehensible to them.** Similarly, our state provides public goods and benefits to the community. However, the state's lack of access to interpretation services prevents our communities who speak Indigenous languages from accessing public goods, services and resources.

Over 35,000 Oregonians speak an Indigenous language as their primary language, but the current lack of Indigenous interpretation services are a detrimental barrier for community wellbeing. Too often, Indigenous Oregonians are denied life-saving care, access to critical services, and are at risk of imprisonment and deportation due to language barriers.

**Senate Bill 612 will allow for the development of language proficiency evaluation mechanisms for Indigenous languages, allowing interpreters to demonstrate their language skills and obtain formal credentials.** The bill will also 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.



The lack of interpretation services has also created a barrier preventing Indigenous language-speakers from engaging in policy-making processes and discussion. **Senate Bill 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 policy proposals that directly concern Indigenous Oregonians.**

The passage of Senate Bill 612 and Senate Bill 911 would ensure we are including Indigenous communities who speak Indigenous languages in our policy making and providing equal access to our state agencies, health, and judicial spaces. **The ACLU of Oregon urges your support for Senate Bill 612 and Senate Bill 911, and asks you to pass them out of committee.**

Respectfully,

**Mariana Garcia Medina**, Senior Policy Associate

Email: [mgarciamedina@aclu-or.org](mailto:mgarciamedina@aclu-or.org)