
February 27, 2023

Senator Kate Lieber, Chair
Senate Committee on Rules
900 Court Street, NE
Salem, OR 97301

RE: Testimony in Support of SB 612 and SB 911

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

We are writing in support of SB 612 and SB 911 which would improve the state's systems to be more inclusive and equitable for Indigenous Language speakers.

Oregon is home to over 35,000 community members who speak an Indigenous language from Mexico, Central America or South America as their primary language. Yet none of our statewide systems reliably provide interpretation in these languages and opportunities are lacking for Indigenous Language speakers to have their voice and needs represented in informing services and policy. These are significant barriers to both access to essential services and to social inclusion across the state.

The limited access to quality interpretation services for these communities sometimes results in Indigenous Oregonians being denied life-saving medical care, unable to access critical services, or wrongfully imprisoned and deported. It also threatens the ability of community service providers and state agencies to accomplish their work and serve these community members effectively, fairly and in compliance with the law.

Contributing to the issues are the multiple challenges Indigenous interpreters face in performing their critical function and in advancing their careers. These challenges include being asked to provide services for free or at a low wage and being expected to demonstrate credentials that are not possible for them to obtain.

SB 612 and SB 911 address these issues:

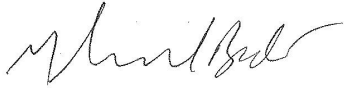
SB 612 establishes the Indigenous Language Justice Fund to support Indigenous languages interpretation in the state. The bill develops language proficiency evaluation mechanisms and makes training accessible, allowing interpreters to demonstrate their language skills and obtain formal credentialing and recognition as interpreters. It also ensures people who speak Indigenous languages don't have to pay for their own interpretation.

SB612 will enhance not only access to critical services, but also offer a viable employment opportunity for people who speak Indigenous languages to provide this valuable service to the state while earning a fair and living wage.

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 peoples from these regions are represented in state government and have a direct voice in policy proposals that concern their communities.

We at Multnomah County support SB 612 and SB 911 and ask that you take these necessary steps to improve Oregon's systems and ensure equitable access to essential services for Indigenous Language speakers.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mohammad Bader', written in a cursive style.

Mohammad Bader, MS,LPC
Director
Department of County Human Services