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**Planned Parenthood Advocates of Oregon**

February 27, 2023

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

On behalf of Planned Parenthood Advocates of Oregon, I'm writing today to express support for SB 612 and SB 911. As an organization dedicated to the advancement of health equity and who helped to pass the landmark Reproductive Health Equity Act in 2017, we believe this bill makes an important advancement in access to care for all Oregonians.

We believe that all people have the right to be heard and to be understood. Access to services in your own language is particularly important when trying to navigate the complexity of our health care system, and when making personal decisions about your sexual and reproductive healthcare.

For many years, the Oregon Legislature has made meaningful strides towards ensuring all Oregonians have the right to understand and be understood. Through the creation of new state programs and investments into quality interpretation services, the experience of many of those who don't speak English as a first language has dramatically improved in a variety of settings.

Unfortunately, there remains a lack of quality interpretation services for those who speak languages that are Indigenous to what is modern-day Mexico, Central America, and South America. This is the result of a few specific and related factors:

1. Limited funding and low pay for quality Indigenous interpretation services. Many entities are hesitant to pay Indigenous interpreters fair wages because of a lack of funding, or Indigenous interpreters are not paid a fair wage due to a lack of credentialing (see the point below); too often, Indigenous Oregonians do not receive interpretation because they or their service provider cannot afford it.
2. The lack of a formal mechanism for Indigenous interpreters to demonstrate proficiency in an Indigenous language, which is a significant barrier to interpreters being able to obtain the credentials needed to provide interpretation in healthcare or judicial spaces, or to advance their professional career;
3. A lack of consultation with Indigenous communities in interpretation-related policy and funding discussions;

Over 35,000 Oregonians speak an Indigenous language as their primary language, but the current lack of Indigenous interpretation services too often leads to Indigenous Oregonians being denied life-saving care due to language barriers, an inability to access critical services, or imprisonment and deportation.

That is why we urge the committee today to support 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 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. 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.

Sincerely,

Cassie Purdy  
Political Director  
Planned Parenthood Advocates of Oregon