

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

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

My name is Petrona and I have lived in Washington County for over 20 years. I am writing in support of SB 612 and SB 911.

For many years, the Oregon Legislature has made meaningful strides towards ensuring all Oregonians have the right to understand and be understood. However, 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.

This bill is important to me because I come from a lineage and ancestral history of indigenous family members who speak an indigenous language. Specifically, Q'anjobal, which is one of the many indigenous languages spoken in Guatemala. I can empathize with the need to have more interpreters. When I moved to Oregon when I was 4 years old, I only spoke Q'anjobal and a little bit of Spanish. I had to learn how to speak English and Spanish here in Oregon with little to no help. Which put me in a position to, at the time, be the interpreter growing up for my family. Unfortunately, that led me to forget a part of my identity of speaking my native language to ensure I could communicate and interpret the best of my ability with the two worlds I was navigating, my family and society. Had we had services like this bill that would not only support interpretation but also promote the sacredness of these languages, I would have been in a different situation today.

Thankfully, we have the opportunity to tackle this problem this session with SB 911 and SB 612.

- 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.

I urge your support of these important bills and vote yes on SB 911 and SB 612.

Sincerely,

Petrona Dominguez Francisco