



February 28, 2023

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

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in **support of Senate Bills 612 and 911, which will ensure that Indigenous Oregonians have access to quality interpretation services.**

My name is Alberto Gallegos and I am testifying on behalf of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), Oregon. SEIU Oregon is composed of SEIU Local 503 and SEIU Local 49, which together represent over 87,000 people. Local 49 represents private sector janitors, property service workers, light manufacturing, and healthcare workers; while Local 503 represents homecare workers, private nonprofit workers, in-home childcare providers, nursing home workers, and state and local government employees.

SEIU Local 49 has many members who speak English as a second language, while Local 503 communicates in five different languages, which is one reason that we are grateful that 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 the 35,000 Oregonians who speak languages that are Indigenous to what is modern-day Mexico, Central America, and South America. This is the result of the following:

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; 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;

The current lack of Indigenous interpretation services creates a language barrier that results in Indigenous Oregonians constantly being denied life-saving care, an inability to access critical services, and imprisonment or deportation. SB 612 and SB 911 would address these issues.



Service Employees International Union – Oregon State Council

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.

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.

SEIU Oregon strongly urges the Committee to support SB 612 and SB 911.

Thank you,

Alberto Gallegos
Political and Government Relations Organizer
SEIU Oregon State Council