



Date: February 28, 2023
To: Senate Committee on Rules
From: Community Alliance of Tenants
RE: Support SB 612 and SB 911

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

My name is Kim McCarty and I represent the Community Alliance of Tenants (CAT)

CAT is a membership-based statewide association of over 6000 tenants. We educate and empower tenants to demand safe, stable, and affordable rental homes.

We urge this support of SB 911 and SB 612 as a step forward to ensuring access to information regardless of the language you speak.

Language access and cultural competency is critical to the success of the Community Alliance of Tenants, so we applaud the efforts to ensure proper policies for this critical community service. Many tenants that we assist do not speak English as their first language, so they may have difficulty understanding lease agreements or applications for assistance. As a result, they are more vulnerable to eviction and displacement. To offer proper assistance we seek to hire bi-lingual staff or contractors with the proper language proficiency.

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;



funding discussions;

3. A lack of consultation with Indigenous communities in interpretation-related policy and

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.

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!

Sincerely,

Kim McCarty
Executive Director
Community Alliance of Tenants