



Isabela Villarreal

**RE: Support for Indigenous Language Justice - SB 612 and SB 911**

March 2, 2023

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

My name is Isabela and I am the Policy and Communications Director at Next Up Action Fund. Our mission is to build political power with diverse young people to achieve a more just and equitable Oregon. Everyone deserves to understand and be understood, especially during some of life's biggest and most important moments. We strongly support Indigenous Language Justice Bills: SB 911 and SB 612.

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

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 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 careers;

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

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 for both SB 911 and SB 612 to help address these important issues and ensure that Indigenous Oregonians have access to quality interpretation services.

Thank you,

Isabela Villarreal  
Policy and Communications Director