



February 28th, 2023

Chair Lieber, Vice-Chair Knopp, and members of the Senate Committee on Rules,

My name is Liz Marquez and I'm the policy associate at PCUN, Oregon's Farmworker Union. At PCUN, we work to empower farmworkers and Latinx working families to improve their working conditions through community building, organizing, and policy advocacy.

On behalf of our members, I am writing to express their strong support for SB 612, which establishes the Indigenous Language Justice Fund, and SB 911 which creates the Commission for Original Peoples of South America, Central America, and Mexico.

In Oregon, there are about 87,000 hand-harvest farmworkers<sup>1</sup> and 40% of those farmworkers identify as Indigenous of Mexico and/or Central America and speak exclusively Indigenous languages<sup>2</sup>. The majority of our members live and work in the Mid-Willamette Valley where the top Indigenous languages spoken are Purepecha, Zapoteco, Mam, and Mixteco.

During the pandemic, Indigenous communities were amongst those who were disproportionately impacted due to barriers to Indigenous language access to COVID-19 mitigation measures. Seeing the barriers our communities faced, PCUN fundraised significantly and advocated for there to be Indigenous language access and mitigation measures. Additionally, PCUN ensured that all of the top spoken Indigenous languages were accessible through the Oregon Worker Relief Fund and have made efforts to hire staff who have Indigenous language skills to support with our outreach and education. Organizations like PCUN have worked to ensure Indigenous communities are not excluded from essential services and programs. It is past time our state systems also provided language access to Indigenous communities.

There are over 35,000 Oregonians who 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. Our members who speak Indigenous languages have

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<https://www.oregon.gov/oha/HPA/HP-PCO/Documents/2018%20Updates%20to%20MSFW%20Enumeration%20Studies%20Report.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.adph.org/ALPHTN/assets/042309\\_promote.pdf](http://www.adph.org/ALPHTN/assets/042309_promote.pdf)

also expressed how they wish they could understand what is happening in their children's schools to be more involved in their education.

As our state moves forward, we need to ensure that Indigenous communities are no longer left behind or excluded and that they are represented and have a direct voice in decision making. We also need to ensure that Indigenous interpreters who provide these important services are paid a living wage. As farmworkers, our members understand that being labeled "essential" does not mean being paid like you are valued. Indigenous interpreters provide essential services to our communities and we want to make sure they are paid fairly for their skills.

Through SB 612 and SB 911, we have the opportunity to address these issues.

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.

Thank you for your time and consideration of these bills. We urge your support for SB 612 and SB 911.

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PCUN