

Submitter: Kenzi Garner  
On Behalf Of:  
Committee: House Committee On Early Childhood and Human Services  
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB2976

Chair Hartman, Vice-Chair Nguyen, Vice-Chair Scharf, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Kenzi Garner and I reside in Portland, OR. I strongly support HB 2976. All Oregonians deserve to be understood and have others understand them. But that is not the reality for the 50,000+ Oregonians who speak an Indigenous language from present-day Mexico, Central, or South America.

With limited exceptions, credentials are required by some state entities to provide interpretation services. But, in order to obtain a credential, an interpreter must demonstrate they are qualified. The best way to demonstrate qualifications is by passing a formal language proficiency exam. These exams don't currently exist for many Indigenous languages from these regions, which hinders the ability of interpreters to provide their services in a variety of settings.

HB 2976 would allocate funding to develop language proficiency evaluations, recruit and retain a qualified workforce, and coordinate appointments across many different entities, helping remove significant barriers for individuals needing interpretation services in some of life's most critical moments.

Oregon is a melting pot of Indigenous peoples, from the many tribes who have been native to this river valley since time immemorial, to those who have been displaced from their traditional homelands and found a new home here. Additionally, many BIPOC people reside here due to the history of their labor being used to build the infrastructure and industry that we all benefit from today. I honor the terrible sacrifices and grieve the oppression so many of our BIPOC neighbors have undergone and currently experience as consequence from the invisible US caste system. You have the power to make this system an iota more equitable by improving language accessibility.

No Oregonian should be faced with language access barriers in emergency rooms, nor if they need to seek legal assistance after becoming a victim of crime. HB 2976 will help close these barriers and we urge your support of this important bill.

Sincerely,  
Kenzi Garner