

Submitter: Janellie Mesa
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 Janellie Mesa and I reside in Portland. 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.

Language is a social determinate of health. It is essential that in order to achieve Oregon's goal of ensuring health for all Oregonians that language access be provided to all Oregonians, including those who only speak Indigenous languages from Mexico, Central, or South America. Health equity begins with investments towards an infrastructure that supports interpretation services and an avenue for qualified interpreters of Indigenous languages to receive credentials without additional barriers. This will help greatly in providing equal access to so many services, including health care.

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,

Janellie Mesa, MSW/MPH