

Submitter: Anna Belew

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Early Childhood and Human Services

Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB2976

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

I am writing to you today in support of HB 2976 to reduce barriers to interpretation for indigenous language speakers.

As a linguist with a doctorate in Indigenous language issues, I am urging you to vote yes on HB 2976. Language access is much more than a symbolic or abstract human right - it has real life-or-death consequences for Oregonians who speak Indigenous languages.

Research shows that communities who speak and use their Indigenous languages have lower youth suicide rates, lower rates of drug and alcohol abuse, better high-school graduation rates, and greater economic prosperity.

Conversely, when language access is neglected and Indigenous languages are suppressed, people die from not being understood in legal and medical settings, and youth suicide rates rise.

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. Many interpreters of indigenous languages are currently excluded from credentialing due to a lack of proficiency exams in these languages.

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.

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.

I strongly urge you to support HB 2976.

Sincerely,  
Anna Belew  
Portland, OR