



Chair Hartman, Vice-Chair Nguyen, Vice-Chair Scharf, and members of the committee,

For the record, my name is Cameron Coval and I am the Executive Director of Pueblo Unido Pdx, a nonprofit organization that connects Oregonians from present-day Mexico, Central, and South America to Indigenous language interpretation services. We are strongly supportive of HB 2976.

Language justice is the fundamental human right to understand and be understood. All Oregonians should have access to quality interpretation services when they need them, but there remain significant barriers to achieving this reality for the thousands of Indigenous language speakers in Oregon.

With limited exceptions, credentials are required by state entities like the Oregon Health Authority and Oregon Judicial Department to provide interpretation services. In order to obtain a credential, an interpreter often must pass a formal language proficiency exam, but these proficiency exams don't currently exist for many Indigenous languages. The lack of proficiency exams prevents interpreters from inclusion in respective interpreter registries, and organizations and providers can be penalized for not using credentialed interpreters. This Catch-22 presents a major barrier to language access, due process, and informed consent for Indigenous Oregonians.

In 2023, the Legislature appropriated \$2 million to Pueblo Unido to develop four proficiency evaluations for some of the most commonly spoken Indigenous languages in the state. We have since developed, and are now applying, a model that can be replicated to create a proficiency evaluation for any Indigenous language from these regions. The bill in 2023 was passed unanimously out of Senate Rules, and the funding was ultimately included in the end-of-session budget bill.

Over just the last couple of years, the population of Indigenous language speakers has grown dramatically. It is now estimated that there are over 50,000 Indigenous language speakers who live in Oregon, many in rural communities, far from the I-5 corridor, especially in Umatilla and Lincoln counties. Several additional languages have now become “commonly spoken.” Without access to quality interpretation services, these Oregonians are now being denied life-saving medical care, cannot access basic needs, and are unable to fully participate in their local communities.

In the 2025 session, Pueblo Unido has partnered with Rep. Hartman’s office on an appropriation request of \$1.5 million. Funding would be used to develop three language proficiency evaluations for now-commonly spoken Indigenous languages in Oregon, and to support recruitment, retention, and coordination of a qualified Indigenous interpreter workforce. There is a minor forthcoming amendment that will eliminate Section 2 of the bill to align with this intent.

HB 2976 will help ensure that individuals are able to access qualified interpreters in life’s most difficult moments, whether that’s in a hospital, the courtroom, or enrolling in public benefits. We urge your support of this bill.